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ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE

A Complete Novel

LAND OF THE LAWLESS
By Les Savage, Jr.

OUTPOST
A Novelette by Walt Sheldon

NIGHT ON DON JAIME STREET
By Ernest Haycox

VIRGIN TERRITORY
By Giff Cheshire

And other outstanding features

"You are very good," she told Tilfego. "I wish more people realized how good."

Land of the Lawless, Chap. 14

ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE

Vol. 5, No. 5—July, 1951

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THIS MONTH'S COMPLETE NOVEL: *LAND OF THE LAWLESS*

LEE BANNER, *young frontier lawyer, risks his reputation and his whole professional future when he agrees to defend the aged Navaho, Jahzini, against a trumped-up charge of murder. In doing so, he bucks the strong feeling against the Indians among the whites of Mexican Hat and the surrounding ranges, and challenges big, hard-faced Clay Hackett, ambitious cattleman who is always reaching out for more power. It also sets Lee against his own uncle and foster-father, Henry Dodge, who is county prosecutor and politically dependent on Hackett. But Lee owes a debt to the kindly old Navaho who once took in an orphaned boy, sheltered and fed him, told him the ancient myths of his tribe, made him laugh with the Clown Song. So Lee offers his services to Jahzini and his slim, dusky-skinned daughter, Cristina, breaks with his uncle, and sets out to find the real killer of Indian Agent Wright. He has the help of the fat but shrewd Tilfego, who is as handy with the "chili peppers" as he is at reading sign; but has to battle the opposition of Hackett and his vicious foreman Arles, the suspicions of most of the Navahos, and the surprisingly unco-operative attitude of Julia Wright, Lee's sweetheart and daughter of the murdered man. Lee and Tilfego follow up one lead after another, enduring hardship and encountering deadly danger from bushwhacking whites and* bronco *Navahos—all without avail until the last possible moment, when the truth is revealed in a climax of explosive violence.*

In "Land of the Lawless," author Les Savage, Jr., brings ZGWM readers an excitingly different Western, full of colorful characters and breath-taking action.

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This August issue will be on sale about June 29.

LAND OF THE LAWLESS

An Original Book-Length Novel by Les Savage, Jr.

CHAPTER ONE

Open and Shut

IN THE cell, in the heat, in the stripes of blinding sunlight that slanted through the barred windows, the droning of a fly was the only sound. The old Navaho sat on the rusty cot, staring fixedly at the adobe wall, his eyes as blank as glazed beads.

"Jahzini," Lee Banner said. "*Sixoyan bica dahndinza?*"

The Indian's slack lips worked suddenly at the words. "*Do ya ah-shon dah—*"

"No good?" Banner's voice sounded exasperated. "Of course it's no good if you won't tell us anything." He turned helplessly to Cristina. "Explain to him that we can't help him unless we know everything that happened."

The girl began speaking to her father, intensely, swiftly. Banner could only catch a word here or there and gave up trying to follow. He leaned tiredly against the barred door, tall, blond, broad-shouldered, in a blue serge filmed at the cuffs and coattails with Arizona dust. He had a high forehead, sharply squared off at the temples. His deeply recessed eyes gave his lean face a brooding quality that made it appear older than his twenty-five years.

Cristina broke off finally, waiting for her father to speak. Sunlight made a

shimmering circle on her black hair as she turned to Banner.

"He will not even answer me."

Banner shook his head defeatedly. "I guess there's nothing more we can do, then."

Her eyes widened, dark with plea. She had spent six years at Carlisle, and spoke English with the peculiar precision of one who had learned a foreign language well.

"Lee, do you believe my father killed Wallace Wright?"

Banner stared into her delicate face, knowing it would haunt him now. This was really the first time he had seen Cristina since her return from Indian school a few weeks before. She had left a child, she had come back a woman. Yet there would always be a childlike quality to her, no matter how she matured. The fruitlike curve of her cheek, glowing like sun-tinted copper. The reedlike slimness of her body, in the boarding-school dress of flowered calico. The hair parted in the center like a little girl's, so black it drank in all the light and left only the faintest sheen over the top of her head.

He reached out to grasp her arm. "You know I can't believe Jahzini did it. The man I remember couldn't kill anyone. I may be in the prosecutor's office, Cristina, but I'll do everything in my power to help your father." He watched that draw a shining hope into her eyes, and then turned to call: "We're through now, Charlie."

There was the raucous squeak of a swivel chair. Charlie Drake appeared at the end of the cell block, rattling through the keys on his ring. He unlocked the door and pulled it open.

"I don't see what you hoped to gain out'n that Indian. They got 'nough to hang him a dozen times over."

Banner walked through with stooped shoulders. "What would you do for a friend, Charlie?"

The sheriff pulled the door shut after them with a clang. "Don't get sucked into anything, Lee."

Banner's boots beat a hollow tattoo against the cement floor. The outer door creaked dismally on unoiled hinges. He followed the girl into the furnace of Mexican Hat in June.

Banner's eye automatically registered the picture—the buildings across from the courthouse, the curlicued facade of Blackstrap Kelly's saloon jammed up against the row of enigmatic adobes, the false fronts of Sam Price's Mercantile and the harness shop. For six blocks it ran, the old and the new, fronted by the inevitable sagging hitchracks, the rusty ring posts.

He felt Cristina's hand on his arm, and realized they had reached Jahzini's old Studebaker wagon, its split front axle bound with rawhide. He halted awkwardly here, not knowing what to say. Cristina's lower lip trembled.

"Judge Prentice has a pretty full docket," he said. "They haven't set any date for the trial yet, but I imagine it won't be till late summer. Maybe something will turn up by then."

The shadow of a man came into Banner's vision. It touched the wagon, stopped.

"Checking up on the case, Lee?"

"Doing what I can, Arles."

Arles took a deep drag on his cigarette, smiling loosely. He was tall, dour, slack as a piece of old hemp. Beneath the battered brim of a ten-gallon hat, his face was burned almost black by the sun. In the shadow of the brim, the movement of his eyes from Cristina to Banner made a shuttling gleam.

"I thought Henry Dodge had already

questioned Jahzini."

"He has, Arles."

"Doing some leg work, maybe."

"Not exactly."

"Oh. Not exactly." Arles took a last drag on his smoke. Then he pinched it out between his thumb and forefinger. He saw their eyes on it, and smiled. "Most folks won't believe them rope calluses are that thick. I can pinch a match out the same way. Don't feel a thing."

"Don't you?"

Arles flicked the cigarette butt away. He turned to Cristina. "Rainbow Girl," he said. It brought a flush to her face. "Maybe you asked Banner to defend your father," he said.

"You know it's as good as an insult to use their Indian names," Banner told him. "Why do you keep on doing it?"

Arles looked at Banner. "You going to defend Jahzini?"

"Why don't you let it go, Arles? It's been hard enough on Cristina."

"Dodge wouldn't like you defending Jahzini. Not when he's prosecuting the case. Be like his own son turning against him. Dodge always said you was like his own son."

Banner's voice was thin. "How about Hackett?"

"Hackett wouldn't like it either. Nobody would. There's a lot of feelings against the Indians about this. You know how much trouble they've caused us over that railroad land. The case is open and shut, anyway."

"That sounds like something Hackett told you to memorize."

Arles's eyes flickered. The loose grin formed slowly, with palpable effort. "Don't make me mad, Lee."

"This isn't any of your business, Arles."

"I just wanted to put you right, Lee. You've got too big a future in that prosecutor's office. You don't want to ruin it over some old drunk Indian that never did any good for—"

"He's not an old drunk!" Banner was surprised at how loud his voice was. "He's my friend and he was my father's friend before me—"

"Take it easy, Lee. You'll bust a gut."

"Then leave us alone, Arles. Cristina's in no shape for this kind of thing."

Arles chuckled softly. His eyes passed over the girl, slyly. "I hadn't thought of that," he said. "See you so much with Julia Wright, I hadn't thought of that at all. You'd be a fool to mess your whole career up over some little desert slut—"

Banner's violent lunge cut Arles off, driving him back so hard he crashed into the wagon. As he went, Arles slapped at his gun. But Banner grabbed the wrist in his left hand, pinning it against Arles's side. With his other hand he bunched the man's shirt up across his chest and threw the whole weight of his body into holding Arles against the wagon. His voice shook when he spoke.

"I told you to leave her alone, Arles. Now get out of here, and don't ever let me hear you talk that way about her again."

He held Arles a moment longer. The man's frame was rigid against Banner, and there was a vicious rage stamped into his face. Banner stepped back, releasing him.

Arles's whole body came forward involuntarily, his hand gripping the gun.

"They'd lynch you for that," Banner said. "Not even Hackett could save you."

Arles hung there a moment longer. At last he brought his rage under control. His voice had a rusty sound.

"Mighty safe without your cutter, ain't you?"

"You can have it any way you want it. All you have to do is unbuckle your belt, if you aren't through."

The man's narrow head lowered a little. He did not speak. He did not move. The breath passing through him had a husky, animal sound. Finally his boots scraped softly against the sun-baked earth.

"You're a damn fool, Lee," he said.

He glared at Banner a moment longer. Then he wheeled around. His shadow slid off the wagon. Banner felt Cristina's hand on his arm.

"It is always like an explosion, when you get mad."

He tried to relax, tried to smile, couldn't. "He built me up to it."

"He has always hated me," she said. "Ever since he tried to make love with me at the trading-post that time and I scratched his face."

Banner was frowning now, still watching Arles cross the street. "Why should he have done that? Any of that?"

"He was probably speaking for Hackett. Why wouldn't Hackett want you to defend my father?"

"I'd like to know," Banner said.

After Cristina said good-by, after she got into the wagon and turned it down Reservation Street, Banner remained in front of the jail, watching her go. She would be returning to her mother, out there in the lonely hogan beyond Yellow Gap. Banner had spent a year in that hogan, after his father's death. He had been twelve years old, and Jahzini had been his father's only friend, in this barren country. The old Indian had taken the boy in, had treated him as his own son, till Banner's uncle had come west to care for him.

All the memories of that year welled up in him now. Jahzini, sitting cross-legged in the hogan, kindness and warmth in every seam of his nut-brown face, holding Banner and Cristina round-eyed and spellbound as he recounted the ancient myths of his people. Jahzini, half-drunk on *toghlepai*, a chuckling little gnome lying on his back and thumping his belly like a drum and singing the Clown Song till the children and even his sober wife were doubled over with laughter. Jahzini, forcing his portion of mutton on a hungry boy when a bitter winter had left them without enough to go around.

In this mood, he crossed the street toward Henry Dodge's law offices. Before he reached the bank, the outside stairway coming down from above began to tremble, and finally Banner's uncle stepped out onto the plank sidewalk. Fifty, white-haired, ruddy-faced, Dodge was inclined to paunch and seat. He saw Banner and halted on the walk, grinning at him.

"Looking for you, son. The sheriff got permission from Fort Defiance to impound all of Wright's official papers till the trial. Might be some evidence among them that would help the People. I'd like you to pick the stuff up."

"Isn't that Sheriff Drake's job?"

"He and I both thought it would be easier on Julia if you did it," Dodge said. "Better take the wagon. Might be a load."

Banner's mind was hardly on what Dodge was saying. "Henry, I can't believe Jahzini did this. There's something funny about it. He's so changed, so dazed. All he does is sit there and

tell us it's no good—"

"And claim he didn't do it," Dodge finished. "Of course he's dazed. I'd be dazed too, with the evidence piling up against me like that."

Dodge put a fatherly hand on Banner's shoulder. "I know how far back your attachment for Jahzini goes, Lee. But he was drunk when they found him. A man ain't in his right mind when he's drunk. And you know the trouble Jahzini had with Wright. The Indian was on one of those alternate sections the government gave to the railroad. Wright got the order to move him to land just as good. Jahzini wouldn't go. He was drunk that time too and he threatened to kill Wright if the man came again. And now we got a statement from Jess Burgess saying that he had arranged to buy wool from Jahzini in town on the day of the murder. That'd mean Jahzini was coming through Yellow Gap about the time Wright was killed there. Cristina herself said Jahzini started out with the wool. He never reached town. To top it all, they found Wright's burned saddlebags in Jahzini's *hogan*."

"That's it," Banner said. "Why would he want the saddlebags?"

"Those Indians are natural-born thieves—"

"Now you're talking like Hackett."

"What's Hackett got to do with it?"

"That's what I'd like to know. Why should Hackett be afraid I might defend Jahzini?"

Dodge's twinkling eyes went blank. "You, defend Jahzini?"

"Hadn't you considered the possibility, Henry?"

A little muscle twitched in Dodge's cheek. His voice came from deep in his throat. "Son, you might as well stand out here on the street with everybody watching and slap me in the face."

Banner grasped his arm, suddenly contrite. "It won't come to that, Henry. You've always said a prosecutor owes as big a duty to the accused as he does to the People. I know you'd do everything you could to get Jahzini free if you thought he was innocent. Now, why is Hackett so interested?"

"How would I know, Lee?"

"He's one of your principal constituents, isn't he? Without his support you wouldn't be district attorney today. And now he's pushing you toward that superior bench—"

"Now you're goin' off half-cocked like you always do, jumpin' in with both feet before you even know what's there—"

"Or maybe you don't want to know what's in Hackett's mind," Banner said. "Maybe you're afraid to dig any deeper than this."

"Son, stop it! We never talked like this before."

"Maybe it's time we did."

Dodge's voice sounded guttural with restraint. "Don't make me mad, Lee."

Banner frowned at him. "It's funny," he said. "That's the same thing Arles told me."

CHAPTER TWO

The Book of the Earth

IT WAS one o'clock when Banner came back to Reservation Street with the cut-under spring wagon. He was still depressed and confused from his talk with his uncle. Had his usual impulsiveness led him to jump to the wrong conclusions? He

tried to tell himself Dodge would not compromise on this case. His faith in the man's integrity went back too far.

Moodily he pulled up before Blackstrap Kelly's. Under the curlicued facade, the saloonkeeper sat on an upended barrel, lovingly blowing the head off a beer.

"I swear," Banner said, "you get more kick blowing that foam off than you do drinking the stuff."

Kelly thumped the barrel with his wooden leg. "Head's the best part. Look at this now. Frothy. Lacy. Like something a woman would wear."

"Tilfego inside?"

"As usual. Out back, proposing to my cook." Kelly sent him an oblique look. "You going in?"

Banner frowned down at the man. "What's the matter?"

Kelly brushed a bulbous thumb across his nose. "You ain't really takin' that Injun killer's case, are you, Lee?"

Banner's voice grew low. "You too, Blackstrap?"

The man tapped his wooden leg uncomfortably against the barrel. "I'm sick of this Injun trouble. Some of my best friends got holdings north of the railroad. Only last week some Injuns run off a hundred of Elder's cattle."

"Which they claimed he originally cheated them out of."

"That ain't true. He bought 'em from Hackett. He's got a legal bill of sale."

"Then maybe it was Hackett that cheated them."

"They're always claiming something like that. What they makin' such a fuss over losin' a few acres for, anyway? They've still got half of Arizona. They signed a dozen treaties—"

"All of which we broke."

"Damn it, Lee—" the man twisted angrily on his barrel, looking up at Banner with a flushed face—"that's exactly what I mean. You keep on talkin' this way and you'll lose every friend you have in this town. These Navahos have pushed us too far. This murder is the last straw. There wasn't a better man in the world than Wright. He didn't have an enemy in this town. If he couldn't settle this trouble with the Injuns nobody could. He never raised a hand to 'em, he did more for 'em than their own people would. And what do they do? Kill him. Shoot him from ambush like the dirty coyotes they are."

"Is that the feeling in town?" Banner asked, quietly.

Blackstrap looked morosely at the plank walk. "I've heard talk of lynchin'."

"So you wouldn't want me to come into your saloon any more, if I was going to defend Jahzini."

"Dammit, Lee, I didn't say that—"

"I'll tell Jigger to bring you out another beer," Banner said.

Somberness left Banner's eyes half-lidded, made his face older, as he went into the saloon. He hadn't fully realized until now what the feeling of the town was about this killing. Absently, he caught Jigger's attention, jerking his thumb toward the front door, and the bartender began drawing another beer for Blackstrap. Banner passed the trio of townsmen at the bar, the bored faro dealer smoking over an empty layout. He pushed open the kitchen door. At the big table sat Tilfego, broad, squat, sloppy. He had the cook on his lap, poking at her amplitude with a hairy finger.

"So much ripeness I have never see. If someone they do not come along and pluck you, Celestina, you will fall off the bough."

"Will you really marry me, Tilfego?" she asked.

"You and six hundred others," Banner said.

They both turned in surprise. Then Tilfego grinned.

"You are just in time the best man to be, Lee. Celestina, this is my very good friend, my best friend, my only friend. He and I we grow up together, both of us."

"How about a little hunting?" Banner asked.

Tilfego's eyes glowed eagerly. "Hunting?"

"You'd better," Banner said. "A married man doesn't get out much."

"If you will allow me to rise, my dove, my pigeon, my little *chilipiquine*," Tilfego said, "married we can get upon my return."

"I don't think you mean to marry me at all," she said.

"On the honor of my grandfather."

"The horse thief?" Banner asked.

Banner finally got him out into the wagon. As they were rattling down Reservation Street toward the desert, Tilfego slid off his ancient sombrero and ran thick fingers through hair like the roached mane of a horse.

"*Que barbaridad*," he sighed. "I never see so much heat. Hunting you do not want to go in this furnace?"

"Not really. You been tracking for the army lately?"

"No. And something I got to make soon. My money he is all spend."

"How about reading some sign at Yellow Gap? I'll buy you a beer afterward."

Tilfego slapped him on the back. "Who cares for beer? I have not see you enough lately. And now is this business of Jahzini. And you do not think he kill Wright."

Banner glanced at him, grinning ruefully. "I hope you find sign that easy at Yellow Gap."

"Is not hard for to see how you feel, Lee. Perhaps the land she will tell us what we want to know."

They had left the town. They were in the land of illusion, the Painted Desert, where the colors were constantly changing with the caprice of heat and light and desert dust, where vast distances staggered the eye. They crossed a meadow of sacaton grass that rose to meet them like the restless swell of a tawny sea. They dipped into a gorge cut by eons of wind and water. They finally reached its eastern end and rolled into an endless greasewood plain, studded with castellated mesas.

The cut-off to Yellow Gap was ten miles east of Mexican Hat, the gap itself three miles north along the cut-off. It was fissured and shelved by erosion, its walls sculptured into weird mosques and minarets. The road followed the rim for half a mile, then shelved down the west wall. It was a sandy, slippery descent, with the brake shoes shrieking most of the way. The horses hit the bottom blowing with relief.

Far ahead they saw the towering column of rock near which the Indian agent's body had been found. Tilfego made Banner stop the wagon a hundred yards from the spot and they went the rest of the way on foot. Finally Tilfego halted, staring at the yellow earth.

"*Que barbaridad,*" he said. "Look at the mess they make."

"I guess that's why nobody else could read much sign," Banner said. "The bunch that came down to get Wright's body wiped it all out."

All Banner could see were the imprints of shod hoofs and boots and the wheel tracks of wagons criss-crossing the sand. But Tilfego finally began picking his way carefully through the marks until he reached a spot a few yards distant. He squatted down there and traced the outline of a man's figure with his hairy forefinger. It was like dawning light. Banner could see clearly the depression the body had left, with all the other prints superimposed upon it.

Squatting there, the seat of Tilfego's greasy buckskin *chivarras* shone wetly across his broad rump. The Mexican was studying the surrounding terrain now, his brown eyes squinted almost shut with concentration. Finally Tilfego pointed at a patch of creosote, twenty feet away.

"Somebody he stand there. Twig he is break."

"Could it be the bunch that got the body?"

"Many men they would have break more brush." Tilfego rose and moved over to the creosote, studying the earth for a long time.

"He come down here from the east rim, then he go back up," the Mexican said, at last. "While he stand here, something she make him jump. You can see where his boots they have change the position. If it was behind him he would have turn. But he did not turn." Tilfego looked across the canyon. "I think she was something up on that west rim."

They got into the wagon again, drove back up the road to the rim. They left the wagon in some greasewood and worked their way northward along the rim. It was a long, maddening search. It took the Mexican over an hour to find it. At last, in a thick growth of prickly pear, he squatted down.

"One man. On a shod horse. Coming from the north. About three days past."

Excitement lent Banner's face a boyish eagerness. "The day of the murder."

Tilfego rose, following the tracks toward the rim of the gap, halting again in a stand of wind-twisted junipers that overlooked the canyon. He studied the surrounding trees for a long time, finally fingered a wisp of something from the rough bark.

"Horse he is a bay. Scrape his hair off here."

"It couldn't have been the killer?"

"No. This man he did not even go down into the gap. He wait here awhile, then he turn and go back north."

"Then that's what startled the killer, down in the canyon. He saw this man up here."

"Maybe not the man. Trees hide him. Maybe just his movement."

"What's the difference? There's every possibility that this man saw the murder. Do you realize what an eyewitness could mean, Tilfego? If Jahzini didn't do it, this would save his life."

"Not so quick, not so quick," chuckled Tilfego, holding up his coffee-colored palm. "Let us read some more."

He spent a long time studying the sign, recounting little details about the horse and rider that would have amazed anyone who had not known Tilfego's uncanny ability. But added up, they did not give Banner much

more to go on.

They returned to the bottom of the gap at last, and Tilfego began to work again. Going to where the unknown man had stood in the creosote, near the body, the Mexican began backtracking along the man's trail, up to the east rim. He was silhouetted at the top among the ocotillo; then he disappeared back of the drop-off.

Banner paced restlessly around the wagon, making sure not to spoil any sign. It must have been half an hour before Tilfego reappeared. He came down from the rim and stopped in the creosote ten feet from Banner.

"This man he hitch his horse way back in the piñon where the rim she starts to drop off."

"Not the bay again?"

"No. This is different man. The horse I know. She got three nail is missing in the left hind hoof."

"Whose horse?"

"In them rocks a long time he hide. A lot of cigarette he smoke. Then he shoot Wright."

"Why did he come down here?"

"To see if Wright was dead for sure, I guess. And while he stand here, the movement of that man on the bay catch his eyes."

"What have you got in your hand?"

"I tell you he smoke cigarette. He try to grind all the butts out with his heel. But one get shoved under a rock."

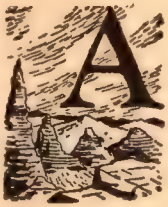
He brought it over to Banner. The butt was about half an inch long.

"An ordinary man, he crush it out against the ground," Tilfego said. "This one is pinched out, like between the fingers."

Banner raised his eyes to Tilfego's sweating face. His voice had a hollow sound. "Arles?"

Chapter Three

Julia Wright



AFTER that they went to the agency. It took them an hour, through the castellated mesas and the tortured gorges and the mesquite-choked washes. Then the horizon flattened out and the buildings appeared as if rising from the ground. Timber was precious in this land, and they were all of adobe, beaten by the wind, the sun, the rain, till they had taken on the hues of the earth itself.

Calico Adams's trading-post was first, a tawny cube of a building. The other buildings were behind the trading-post, the schoolhouse, the agency living-quarters, the shaggy ocotillo corrals. There was a pair of Navaho ponies racked before the post, heads bowed, tails frayed by the wind.

"You won't mention what we found," Banner said.

"My mouth she is sealed," Tilfego said, his eyes on those ponies. His nostrils began to flutter. "*Chilipiquines!*"

"Chili peppers," Banner snorted disgustedly. "How can you tell there are any women around?"

Tilfego's grin tilted his eyes into an Oriental slant. "I don't know. When there are *chilipiquines* around something inside me just start for to buzz like the bee. I look around, I sniff the air, I turn the corner. *Hola!* Chili peppers."

Banner pulled up by the door of the trading-post. "Be careful of those Navaho girls. You know what they think of Mexicans."

Tilfego climbed off the seat, chuckling. "Before I am Mexican"—he

thumped his chest—"I am man."

Banner shook the reins out and drove the wagon around the trading-post toward the agency quarters. He saw that there was a sweat-caked roan standing ground-hitched before the long building, and a man at the doorway.

He turned sharply as Banner approached, and Banner recognized him as Victor Kitteridge. He made a tall and narrow shape in the doorway, his faded denim shirt and jeans so worn they were paper-thin at the elbows and knees. The suspicious calculation in his eyes seemed to have sucked all the warmth from his face.

Julia Wright stood behind him, just within the doorway, and Banner tipped his hat to her before speaking to the man. "Didn't realize you knew the Wrights, Kitteridge."

The fine weather-graining looked like tiny scars at the edges of the man's lips. "Man should stop to pay his respects," he said. "*Ipso facto*, counselor."

Banner's grin was wry. "No law against it. How's the roundup coming? They tell me your increase has been so good you had to hire a Mexican hand."

"Did they?"

Banner's grin faded. "Get any more beef and you'll have to lease some of that railroad land like the rest of the outfits."

"Will I?"

The hammerheaded roan grunted tiredly as Kitteridge stepped over and pulled the latigo tight. He took up the reins, toed a stirrup, and swung aboard. Glancing obliquely at Julia, touching the brim of his battered hat, he turned the horse down the road. Banner watched him go, frowning.

"Lived out here three years and I don't think he's been to town a dozen times. Do you suppose he's on the dodge?"

Something passed through Julia's face as she turned sharply toward him. "I don't know. Dad did him a favor once. He stopped to express his regrets."

Banner swung from the wagon, wrapping the lines around the whipstock. She waited for him silently. The strain, the grief of the last days had left her face pale and drawn. She was a tall woman, almost as tall as Banner. The swell of her breasts was deep and round against the bodice of her watered silk dress, the nearest thing to mourning she could approach in this outpost.

He had heard her called a "handsome" woman. It was a good word. Her brows were heavy saffron sickles above eyes so blue they were almost black. There was a honeyed abundance to her high-piled mass of golden hair.

He stepped into the door and caught her hands. He saw the tension die a little at the corners of her lips.

"I'm so glad you came," she said, her voice low, husky with strain. "You helped so much the other day."

He took her hand. "I'm sorry I couldn't make it sooner. I'm on an unfortunate errand. Dodge got permission from Fort Defiance to impound all your father's official papers till the new sub-agent came out. It was really Sheriff Drake's job, but both he and Dodge thought you'd been through enough already."

Her hand slid from his, she gave a little shake of her head. "It does make it easier, having you do it. But why impound anything? Isn't that a little irregular?"

"Dodge thinks there might be something among the papers that would help the prosecution."

She nodded, turned to lead him across the room. It was cool in here, the coolness of thick adobe walls and heavy earthen roof. Julia led him into her father's office. It still smelled faintly of his pipe tobacco.

She threw open a small trunk. "Most of his official stuff's in here. The more recent letters are in the desk. He had one ready to mail to the Commissioner when he—left." She sat down at the old roll-top desk, began pulling documents from the pigeonholes. Then she spoke again, without looking up at him.

"Did Cristina ask you to defend her father?"

He knew a vague surprise. "Were you in town today?"

"Hackett was by. Arles had told him about it." Tension dug a little crease in the soft flesh beneath her chin. "How could Cristina ask such a thing? Dodge is like your own father. To take the case against him—"

"She didn't ask me to do that," Banner said. "You can't blame her. After all, Jahzini was one of my oldest friends in this country—"

He broke off as she flung up her head, her eyes filled with a naked anger. He stepped forward, grasping her shoulder.

"Julia, I know how you feel, but—"

"Do you?" she said. It was as if the words brought her to her feet. "That you could even talk to that woman!" Her voice was vitriolic. "Or with Jahzini—"

"Julia, I had to—"

"Why? What could you possibly gain?"

"I didn't mean to discuss it with you today, Julia. I wanted to spare you. But if you insist, I doubt very much whether Jahzini murdered your father."

The blood drained from her face. He saw a little vein surface in her temple, beating frantically.

"How can you say that? Every shred of evidence points to Jahzini. I saw him fight twice with Dad over moving from that land. They found Dad's saddlebags right in Jahzini's hogan! All she had to do was come up and ask you. The way she swings her hips—"

"Julia!"

"You're defending them now. That filthy dirty swine murdered my father and you're—"

"Julia!"

He almost shouted it, catching her by the arms and shaking her. When he realized what he was doing, when he saw the pain his grip brought to her face, he stopped. She stared up at him, eyes flashing, and he thought she was going to lash out again. Then, abruptly, all the sand went out of her. Her head dipped against his chest, all the weight of her body sagged against him, and she was crying. He held her tight against him, speaking in a husky voice.

"That's better. You should have done it the first time I came out. You can't keep it all inside."

She didn't answer. She continued to cry, the sobs racking her body. When at last it was over, she leaned against him, wet cheek pressed to his lapel.

"I'm sorry, Lee—"

"I guess you had to let it off somehow. Why don't you come back into town with me? The sooner you get away from here the better."

She shook her head. "I've thought it over. I don't have anywhere to go. No

relatives in the East. This has been my life the last five years. I'd miss teaching those Indian kids. Mrs. Adams said she'd put me up at the post when the new agent came."

"Maybe you're right. I don't think they'd ever get anybody as wonderful with kids as you."

She put a hand on his wrist. "Now, what was it you said about doubting whether Jahzini–Jahzini–"

"I don't want to upset you again."

"Tell me," she said. "I can't be like that again."

He frowned. "Julia, what about that trouble your dad had last year with Hackett over Broken Bit cattle grazing on Indian land?"

"They settled that."

"To the Indian Bureau's satisfaction, maybe. But was your dad satisfied?"

"You know he wasn't," she said. "That's one of the few things I thought he was wrong about. Hackett acted in good faith."

"Did he?"

"Lee, what are you driving at?"

He glanced at the papers in the trunk. "If your dad had been working on anything out of the ordinary, concerning the Indians, it might be in those papers."

"Would we have the right to go through them, Lee?"

"If it meant a man's life–"

"How do you know it means a man's life? What are you going on, anyway?"

He had the impulse to tell her what they'd found at Yellow Gap. Yet he knew it was not completely conclusive, and would only upset her again.

"Maybe I'm wrong, Julia," he said. "I shouldn't have imposed this on you in the first place. Forget it."

"I will," she said. She touched his arm with sudden contrition. "If you'll forget what I said about Jahzini and–the girl."

"Of course I will," he said. And knew, somehow, that he wouldn't.

With all the letters, the documents, the forms in the small trunk, he left Julia and drove back up to the trading-post. He halted the cut-under wagon beside the ratty Navaho ponies, swung down, went inside.

There was a richness to the cool gloom of the room. A richness of barbaric colors blazing from hand-woven blankets, of dully gleaming silver heavy to the hand, of *yei* masks topped with the exotic splendor of guacamayo plumes from Yucatan. The counter ran down one side of the dim room, with the shelves behind it, carrying the beads, the coffee, the tinned fruit, the bolts of gay cloth, the rack of Winchesters. Calico Adams stood there, trying to trade with a pair of Navahos. They were hardly listening. Their attention, sullen, watchful, was on Tilfego.

The Mexican sat on the *bayeta* blankets piled against one of the peeled cedar posts that supported the roof. The girl on his knee was buxom for an Indian. When Tilfego saw Banner, he grinned and pinched her cheek.

"Like the peach, no, *amigo?* She is going to marry me."

"*Do tah,*" the girl said. She giggled and pushed his hand away. "*Do tah.*"

Calico's snowy head glowed like a nimbus in the gloom of the room. "Can't you get that Mex'can out of here?" he asked Banner. "He's ruining my business."

"I've got the papers," Banner told Tilfego.

"How you like the tickle, *chili-piquine?*" Tilfego said, probing at her

with a sly finger.

"Tilfego," Banner said.

"Let us stay a little longer, Lee. The best man you can be."

"You'll have to walk back."

"What a barbarity," Tilfego said. Then he gave an immense grunt, getting up. The girl stumbled backward, sputtering angrily. Tilfego shrugged helplessly. "Tomorrow, *chilipiquine*. Tilfego will come back and marry you then."

In the wagon, rattling down the road, Banner said, "I don't see how you do it. The ugliest man in the world."

Tilfego grinned blandly. "Have you ever see a bird charm by a snake?"

"You should be more careful with those Navaho girls. Those Indians were mad enough to do a scalp dance."

Tilfego shook his head sadly. "Always you preach. Like the voice of my conscious."

"Conscience."

"*Si*, conscious." Tilfego raised his head. "Somebody coming."

Banner could see nothing, at first. Four riders finally appeared on the horizon.

"One is Arles," Tilfego said, before Banner could differentiate between horse and man. "Clay Hackett. Big Red." The Mexican squinted. "The fourth a stranger is."

The quartet was coming down the road at a ground-eating canter, and Banner could make out Clay Hackett, now. One of the biggest ranchers in the county, his six foot body had a slouched ease in the saddle, broad-shouldered, lean-shanked. His grin was broad and confident, but his black eyes could take a bite out of a man. He pulled his horse down, black as sin, without as much as one white stocking on it, and let the animal stir up the yellow dust with its nervous little dance.

"Glad to find you, Lee," he said. "Henry told us you'd come out to impound those papers. We can take them off your hands now. This is the new agent. Claude Miller."

"Claude R. Miller," Arles said.

Banner nodded at the agent. He was slim, dark, in well-cut blue serge. He had a little mustache and a string tie and in a country where the sun made even the white men dark, his face looked pasty. Big Red sat a roan just behind him. Red was three inches taller than Hackett and weighed two hundred and fifty pounds, no fat. His face had a ruddy glow.

"You got a court order for the papers?" Banner asked.

"Dodge said we didn't need that. The sheriff would have to be along to make this official."

"I'm acting for the sheriff," Banner said. "They're officially impounded as of the time I got them."

"Miller just wants to go through them and see if there's anything that might be necessary for his administration," Hackett said.

"He'll have to see Dodge about that," Banner said.

Tilfego grinned blandly at Arles. "You better get the new left hind shoe for that horse. Three nail she is already gone."

Arles was rolling a cigarette. "I'm thinking of running her barefoot," he said.

Hackett stopped his black from fiddling. "What the hell," he said. "Henry told us to pick the papers up."

"That's the gospel," Arles said. He licked his folded cigarette paper, sealed it, looking at Banner all the time.

"I'll be getting along," Banner said.

Hackett leaned forward in his saddle, fixing Banner with his eyes. "Not till you give us the papers."

"I can't give them to you."

"Get them, Red," Hackett said.

Big Red reined his short-coupled roan around the slim dark agent, around Arles, around Hackett. He checked it beside the wagon.

Banner's eyes glittered. "Don't do it, Red."

"Arles," Hackett said.

Arles took a long drag on his cigarette, sidled his horse around to help the redhead. Big Red's saddle creaked as he put all his weight onto his left stirrup, swinging off into the bed of the wagon. He bent over to lift the trunk onto the rump of his roan. Arles reined his horse against the outside of the roan to hold the trunk once it was on the horse. Banner jerked the whip from its holder and lashed it across his nigh animal.

The horse screamed, rearing.

Banner hit the other horse. They both bolted. He heard Big Red shout behind him, pitched off his feet. The whole wagon shuddered as the man's great body struck its bed. Hackett had to dance his black aside to keep from being struck by the rig as it shot by him.

Dust spewed from beneath spinning wheels, iron rims clanged against the rocks of the road. Banner heard a running horse off to his left and saw Arles spurring his mount to catch the wagon. His animal caught up with the rear wheel, drew toward the front. Banner snapped the whip over the team again, trying to get more speed. He heard Big Red scrambling to hands and knees in the bed behind.

Then Arles drew abreast of the front wheel and jumped off his horse at Banner. His body smashed into Banner, knocking him over against Tilfego. Arles braced one leg against the dasher, hit Banner in the face.

It knocked Banner into Tilfego again. Blinded by the pain, he felt the reins torn from his hands. He lunged back up into Arles. The only thing that kept Arles from pitching out was his hold on the reins. It pulled the team hard to the left. Banner felt the wagon slew beneath him as the animals turned sharply.

"Jump," Tilfego shouted. "She is going—"

The horses plunged into the ditch siding the road and went down. The wagon overturned.

Tilfego's form flashed by Banner, like a jumping cat. He pushed off after it. He had a dim sense of Big Red pitched from the bed, as the wagon went on over. And of Arles, jumping too late, caught by the edge of the seat as it came down on him.

Then Banner hit, balled up, and rolled, coming to a flopping halt in a spiny patch of creosote. He turned over and saw that the horses were down, kicking in their traces. Arles was pinned beneath the overturned wagon, apparently unconscious. Big Red was on his hands and knees in the road, shaking his head. Then Hackett came up on a running horse and pulled it to a vicious halt above the trunk, where it had been thrown from the wagon into the road. He leaned out of the saddle, scooping at the handle. Banner got to his feet and scrambled out of the ditch and ran for the man.

Hackett straightened with the small trunk and tried to wheel away. Banner caught up with him, grabbed his arm. Hackett fought. Banner pulled him out of the saddle.

When he realized he was going, Hackett let go of the trunk and tried to come down on Banner. The lawyer jumped away.

Hackett hit on hands and knees and came up like a rubber ball. Banner blocked aside one of his flailing arms and hit him in the face. But Hackett's rush carried him on into the lawyer and he kept driving and it knocked Banner off-balance and finally spilled him.

Banner rolled over to see Hackett still coming in, jumping to spike him with high heels. He flopped out from under and came to hands and knees before Hackett had wheeled back. Banner got to his feet as Hackett rushed. One of Hackett's fists rocked his head and he staggered backward. He caught himself, blocking the next blow, coming inside it. He hit the man in the belly twice, short, vicious blows. They stopped Hackett.

Banner shifted his feet and hit him in the belly again. He put all the weight of his body behind it. Then he hit him in the face.

It straightened Hackett to his full height and spun him around on his heels and pitched him full length to the ground. He lay on his belly, making sobbing sounds into the dirt. Banner stood above him, panting, waiting. Then he heard something behind him, and turned to see Big Red coming toward him, still shaking his head.

"No," Tilfego said. "You better not."

Big Red stopped. Tilfego sat in the ditch, grinning blandly. He had his gun out.

Hackett had trouble getting to his hands and knees. Blood dripped off his face into the dirt.

"You still want that trunk?" Banner asked.

The breath sounded squeezed out of the man. "I'll get it." He spat a tooth. "Damn you. I'll get it."

He tried to get up and almost fell. When he finally gained his feet he spread them wide, swaying dizzily, wiping blood from one edge of his mouth. The new agent sat his fiddling horse a dozen feet back of the overturned rig, face filled with a foolish expression.

"Look here," he said. "Look here."

"Those horses don't look like they've broken any bones," Banner said. "You can help us get this wagon turned back over. If you want to look at the papers, they'll still be in Dodge's office."

Tilfego chuckled. "What a barbarity."

Chapter Four

A Man's Ambition

HENRY DODGE was in his office when Banner got back. The door was open, he was sitting tilted back in his chair with his white-stockinged feet propped up on a pulled-out drawer. The awesome reek of his cigar filled the room and ashes littered the calf-bound copy of Coke's *Commentaries* in his lap. As Banner walked in, carrying the small trunk, the old man's leonine head lifted. Then he put the book hurriedly on the desk, swinging his feet off the drawer at the same time.

"You got it. Good!" He leaned forward, rummaging through the litter of papers on the floor. "Just lemme get my shoes on now and we'll go through it. They—"

He stopped, holding to the tongue of

a shoe he had uncovered. He looked up again, at the bruise mottling Banner's cheek, the jagged tear in his coat sleeve.

"What in the johnny-hell happened to you?"

Banner heaved the little leather-bound trunk onto the desk. "Hackett tried to take it away from me."

Dodge set the shoe on the pulled-out drawer, frowning at Banner. "Didn't he tell you? I said it was all right, son, if he met you on the way back. I didn't expect that new agent so soon. He'll probably need some of the stuff himself. He told me he'd hold it all for whenever I wanted it."

"His name is Claude Miller," Banner said. "Isn't that Hackett's cousin? The man who's been clerking for three years at Fort Defiance, waiting for Hackett to pull some strings and get him an agency?"

"I suppose so. I don't see why you wouldn't hand the papers over. They're his by right, now."

"And since he's Hackett's cousin, I don't doubt Hackett will get a look at anything he wants. Why should Hackett be so eager for those papers? It made me suspicious right there. So suspicious I went through the trunk on the way in here."

Dodge's eyes widened. "You? A lawyer—"

"Don't cite the book at me now, Henry. I'd break a hundred laws if it would save an innocent man's life." Banner got the envelope he had opened from his pocket, pulled the letter from it. "Wright had written this to the Commissioner the very day he went out to be killed. Want to read it?"

Dodge snorted. "I won't compound a felony."

"I'll tell you what's in it, then," Banner said. "Wright told the Commissioner that for the last six months he had been gathering proof against Clay Hackett. Wright claimed that now he could prove in court, beyond a doubt, that Hackett was mixed up in one of the dirtiest swindles that had ever been perpetrated against the Indians—"

"You're talking about that grazing trouble again. It was all settled last January."

"In this letter, Wright said that the January arbitration was just a farce. Hackett hasn't observed a single article of his agreement. Wright claims he has statements from two sub-agents that Hackett used his influence with the Indian Bureau to have at least six different families forced off their rightful lands, some of the best graze in the Corn River bottoms. He has depositions from two white ranchers that Hackett used force in a dozen instances to drive other Indians off their graze. He has a hundred statements from Indians and traders of beatings and burnings and mass slaughter of their sheep."

Dodge leaned back in his chair, a deep frown ridging his forehead. "I can't believe it. I just can't believe it." He looked up. "Those depositions, statements—"

"I couldn't find them. They weren't in the trunk. We even ripped out the lining. I think Wright must have been carrying all that proof with him. Remember the burned saddlebags they found at Jahzini's?"

Dodge spread his hands. "But without them—"

"We've still got a case." Banner pulled the stub of the cigarette from his pocket, put it on the desk. "We found this at Yellow Gap. Pinched out. Who else around here but Arles puts

his cigarette out that way?"

Dodge stared at it. "Arles might have stopped for a smoke on that rim anytime during a week before or after the killing."

"There was other sign. Tilfego recognized the tracks of Arles's horse, the back left shoe with the nails missing. Arles's own tracks led down from the rim to a spot near where Wright's body was found."

"Would you swear they were Arles's tracks?"

Banner hesitated, frowning at him. "I—"

"You know you're not that good. And how much would Tilfego's word mean to a jury? He's already been in jail on a perjury charge."

"That stupid case about the horse. He was proved innocent—"

"Stupid or not, he lied under oath. A prosecutor would bring that out. You know what it would do to the jury—"

"You're quibbling," Banner said. "You're overlooking the whole point entirely. I know just about how significant this proof would be in court. I've seen you tear a lot stronger evidence than this to shreds. But we're not just talking about the legal technicalities of evidence. We're talking about a man's life."

"Lee—"

"What's happened to you, Henry? I've seen you actually hand items like this over to the defense. You always bent over backward to see that a man you were prosecuting got a fair trial." Banner drew a soft little breath. "But those cases didn't involve Hackett, did they?"

The old man's eyes flashed up to his in an instant of anger. Then as they dropped to the cigarette butt again, he settled into his chair. The lines seemed to deepen in his face.

"You shouldn't have said that, Lee."

Banner wheeled to the window, unable to bear the hurt he had caused in this man who had been a father to him, staring out at the twilit town through slitted eyes. Tilfego was still sitting where Banner had left him, in the cut-under wagon at the hitchrack before the office stairs.

Dodge's chair creaked softly with his turning motion. "Lee, I know what kind of a man Hackett is. I watched him grow up in this town. You know how no-good his folks were. It didn't leave Hackett much. All he's gotten in this world he's gotten the hard way. It's left him a hard man, I guess. But not the kind of a man who would murder."

Banner saw Tilfego's head raise. The man seemed to be sniffing the air. Suddenly he climbed out of the wagon and disappeared around the corner.

"I disagree," Banner said. "Everybody knows Hackett's land south of the railroad is drying up. If he doesn't keep what he's grabbed north of the railroad, he's through. If Wright's proof was ever brought to light, the Indian Bureau would push Hackett back to his old pastures if it took the U. S. Army to do it. Everything that he's fought for ten years to build here would be wiped out. He's up against the wall, Henry."

Dodge did not answer. Tilfego reappeared on the street below, hanging onto the arm of a girl. He pulled her halfway across the street before she stopped, trying to tug free. He whispered something in her ear. She giggled. She went on across the street with him. They disappeared into Blackstrap Kelly's.

"Did you ever wonder why I wanted to be a lawyer so badly?" Banner asked.

It took Dodge a long time to answer. Finally he sighed heavily. "Natural, I suppose. Growing up in the house of one."

"Not just *any* lawyer's house, Henry. You used to wonder why I played hookey from school so often? It was to watch you try a case. I wanted to be a lawyer like the other boys wanted to be Billy the Kid or an engineer on the railroad. It's something to watch you in court, Henry. A man couldn't see you in action without wanting to be a lawyer."

"Lee—"

"I guess that's the same way you've wanted to sit on the superior bench, isn't it? I guess I didn't really know how much it meant to you till just now. You've been talking about it ever since I can remember. I didn't really take it in, how much it meant to you. If you want that judgeship as bad as I wanted to be a lawyer, I guess I should understand—"

"Lee, don't—"

"And you won't get the bench without Hackett's support, will you?"

"Dammit, Lee, here you are goin' off half-cocked again—"

Dodge's husky shout lifted him up out of the chair. He stood in his stocking-feet, hands opening and closing at his sides. Through the window, Banner heard a shrill feminine squeal from Blackstrap Kelly's. Then a sharp slapping sound. The batwing doors flapped open as the girl pushed through them and ran down the street. Tilfego came running out behind her. He stopped on the sidewalk, staring after her figure.

"*Que barbaridad*," he said.

Banner put his hat back on, taking a deep breath. "You'll turn Wright's letter and that cigarette butt over to the court as items for the defense?"

Dodge spoke in a low voice. "Of course."

"And that's all."

Dodge held out his hand. "Son, we can't swear out a warrant on this evidence. What else can I do?"

That somber look settled vague shadows beneath Banner's prominent cheekbones. He shook his head tiredly.

"Nothing you don't have the courage to do, Henry," he said.

Chapter Five

The Trail North

DUSK was a stain on the town when Banner reached the street. Tilfego was not in sight, and Banner supposed he had gone home. The young lawyer climbed into the wagon and lifted the reins and turned down Aztec to the house he and Dodge shared. Vaguely, he tried to find an excuse for Dodge. Had he been too harsh in his judgment?

As he passed the jail on Aztec Street he found himself staring at the barred windows. It took his mind off Dodge. It brought him the picture of Jahzini again. Not as he had been this morning, dazed, incoherent, shrunken, but a man so much more human than anyone in Mexican Hat would ever realize, a man whose intense affinity with the earth and the sky had molded into him a strange mixture of childish naïvete and aged wisdom, making him one moment a clown, the next a mystic.

Banner could remember a pot-bellied

little gnome whose black eyes twinkled with mischief, teaching a blond boy to play *nanzosh* and running with him after the hoop and shouting as gleefully as another child. Or he could remember sitting out on a lonely mesa with the dawn-tinted statue of a man, so steeped in his closeness with the earth that they could unspeakingly know things together which no white man with all his words and all his sophistries would ever know. . . .

These memories still filled Banner's mind as he reached Dodge's house. It was a long adobe, shoulder to shoulder with a row of other long adobes that fronted right on the street. Banner passed through the wide gate in the patio wall and drove across the flagstoned garden to the stables. Unharnessing the team, watering them, putting two quarts of grain in the trough, he went inside and washed up.

Dodge's bustling Mexican cook fixed him something to eat, but he had no appetite. Finally he took a pot of coffee to the study, tried to settle down to work. He had some conveyancing to do, a codicil to add to a will. But Banner found himself unable to fill out the codicil, the proper phrasing would not come. His mind was still too filled with memories of Jahzini, and with what had happened this evening. And with a bay horse.

Finally that was his uppermost thought. A man on a bay horse who had seen a murder.

He put the deed away, staring blankly at the wall. It seemed hopeless, at first. There were thousands of Indians north of the tracks. A dozen white ranchers and squatters. Hackett himself ran a crew of thirty men. Or it might have been a stranger, wandering in from nowhere.

But Banner's mind clung stubbornly to it. It wasn't logical that Hackett would allow another of his men to wander down that way, knowing Arles would be waiting to kill Wright.

And how about the stranger? The tracks had come out of the north. If it was a stranger, that meant he would have passed through a lot of Indian land. He couldn't do that without being seen, or at least his tracks being seen.

Could it have been one of the Indians themselves? This was shearing time, when they all stayed close to their *hogans*, joining in the work. That cut it down considerably. Banner had seen only a few in town these past weeks. The route through Yellow Gap led to only Calico Adams's trading-post or to town. It would not be hard to find out what Indians had been at those two places the week of the murder.

He went to his bedroom, making a blanket roll. He buckled on his gun. He put enough grub for a couple of days into his saddlebags. He left a note for Dodge saying he had gone hunting. Then he saddled up and rode.

He rode till the moon began to fade and then stopped to sleep in the shelter of a ridge. He awoke with false dawn flushing the sky and started again without breakfast, for he knew that would be waiting ahead. He was deep in the reservation now. He came upon the *hogan* at dawn.

It was what the Navahos called a logs-stacked-up house, made of piñon logs, boughs, cedar bark. It looked indescribably lonely, huddling there with the desert stretching out as far as a man could see on every side. Banner hailed the house.

In a moment the door of woven yucca stalks was pushed aside and

Cristina stooped through, straightening to stare at him. She recognized him and came swiftly forward.

"Lee, what are you doing this far north?"

His center-fire rig creaked softly as he stepped off the horse. "I have reason to believe your father isn't guilty of the murder, Cristina. I'm traveling north to try and find out. I could use your help."

He saw her lips part. In the milky dawn light the piquant oval of her face held a waxen hue. When she finally spoke, her voice trembled with suppressed emotion.

"There is great hurry?"

"Time to tell you about it."

"Come in, then. You surely have not eaten breakfast."

She turned and led him into the low door. Banner stooped through, straightened within the mingled smells so characteristic of these dwellings. The greasy reek of mutton seemed to pervade everything, and with it the penetrating odor of the sumac and piñon gum with which they made their black dyes. Sitting over by the fire was the bent old woman, shawled in her worn *bayeta* blanket, Jahzini's wife, who had been mother to Banner during that year. She came to him with her hands held out.

"*Ahalani, shiyaazh.*" Greetings, my son.

"*Ahalani, shima.*" Greetings, my mother.

She stood a long time gripping his fingers in her sinewy brown hands and staring at him with eyes almost blind from bending over a lifetime of smoky cookfires. Then she waved at the pallets along the wall. He turned right as was the custom of Navaho men upon entering and seated himself upon one of the rolled sheepskins. Cristina ladled mutton stew from the copper kettle into a pottery plate traded from the Pueblos. As she bent to put ash cakes beside the stew, it drew her heavy skirt tight across one hip, revealing surprising fullness. He began to realize how deceptive her apparent slimness might be.

As she took up his meal, he told them about Wright's letter, recounting as much as he could in Navaho so the old woman would understand; then what he and Tilfego had found at Yellow Gap.

Cristina had just poured a cup of coffee, and she turned toward him, still holding it. "Arles," she said. There was a thin bitterness to her voice.

"I think he's our killer," Banner said. "He must have done it for Hackett. He probably came down to the body to get those saddlebags. All the proof Wright had been collecting against Hackett must have been in them. Arles burned it, but the bags weren't completely destroyed, so he planted them here in your hogan while you were out with the sheep to make it even worse for your father."

"There is a chance, then? If we find this man who saw the murder, this eyewitness on the bay horse?"

"*Haat iish baa yanilti?*" the old woman asked.

Banner realized that he and Cristina had reverted to English, and the old woman had asked what they were talking about. Cristina turned and explained the last part of it. When Cristina finished, the old woman turned to Banner, her smoke-squinted eyes luminous with grateful tears.

"*Ah-sheh heh, shiyaazh.*"

Banner turned to Cristina, frowning. "I don't remember the first word."

"Perhaps you never heard it," she said, smiling softly. "It is a word we hardly ever say, even to each other. She said, 'Thank you, my son.' "

They went outside after breakfast and walked to the corral and Banner helped Cristina rope out a shaggy little pinto, lifting the saddle for her. She worked in silence, tugging the latigo tight. Her profile was like a glowing copper cameo. She must have felt his attention on her, she looked up self-consciously, cheeks flushed.

"We will start with the Indians first?"

"They'll be the biggest job," he said. "But we'll do two things at once. They'll know if any strangers passed through the Reservation going toward Yellow Gap. We can find out at the same time what Indians went south last week."

They rode out a narrow arroyo, topped a ridge, and looked out over a desert turned to a green ocean by the early-morning light.

"This is the trail north," Cristina told him. "It will take us by many *hogans*."

They dropped down off the ridge into the vastness of the desert. Before noon they reached the encampment of Cristina's cousins at Red Forks. Three logs-stacked-up houses and a big corral, the flock of sheep held in a brush corral by the boys, the sacks of unwashed wool piled against the houses. The sweating faces and the shy smiles and the greetings. And the questions.

"Any strangers?"

No strangers.

"How was Mexican Hat?"

"I have not been to Mexican Hat since the Mountain Chant."

Wasn't that one of this clan down by Yellow Gap last week? None of us has been down that way in a long time. *Perhaps a cousin.* Yes, a cousin, from up by Chin Lee. *When did he go?* In the month-of-the-big-crust. *That's January.*

They rode again. Banner lost count of the *hogans* they had stopped at, the grinning faces, the disappointments. But at none of them had they heard word of a stranger. There had been a new trader up by Ganado. But he had come in by wagon, and had gone on to the north. Nobody had even seen the tracks of a stranger heading south.

In the afternoon they began to run into big bunches of Hackett's Broken Bit cattle. Banner saw the angry flush it brought to Cristina's face. This was far north of the checkerboard sections the railroad leased to Hackett. This was deep into the Indian's land.

They finally reached a country of gorges and canyons and were soon lost in the aimless meanderings of a chasm cut a hundred feet deep into the surrounding tablelands. The horses started to spook and shy. Then Banner felt the trembling of the earth. The girl pulled her pinto in, turning to stare at him anxiously.

"What is it?" Her voice sounded small.

Before he could answer, the first whitefaces plunged around the turn ahead, spilling from the narrow notch into the broad canyon floor on which they stood. Banner spurred his chestnut up beside Cristina and then neck-reined left, forcing her dancing pinto over to the canyon wall, where a narrow cleft turned the cattle away from the wall in a little eddy. For a moment

the canyon was filled with a sea of plunging backs and tossing horns, and then they were past, and the dust was whispering back into the earth.

A quartet of riders appeared in the notch behind the cattle. Banner saw Hackett's black horse. As he passed the cleft, Hackett caught sight of Banner and the girl. He waved two of his riders on after the cattle, and turned his black toward the wall, pulling it down to a walk. Arles wheeled to follow, a cigarette in one corner of his mouth.

"Looks like we almost wiped you off the walls," Hackett said. He wasn't smiling.

"Couldn't have done better if you'd tried," Banner said.

"We could have done lots better," Arles said, "if we'd tried."

Hackett touched his hat brim. "Afternoon, Cristina."

She dipped her head soberly.

Arles shifted in the saddle. "My back's still sore."

"I was hoping maybe that wagon broke it," Banner said.

Hackett ran a finger inside his lip. "I'll have to get me a new tooth. Dentist said it'd cost twenty dollars."

"An expensive fight," Banner said.

Hackett chuckled suddenly. "Just like when we was kids, Lee. Remember how we used to fight all the time?"

"It wasn't serious then."

The humor was wiped off Hackett's face. "No," he said. "It wasn't serious." He leaned forward in his saddle. "Nosing around, Lee?"

"I guess so."

"Finding out a lot of things?"

"Enough things."

Hackett slapped a hand across his saddle horn. "Damn it, Lee, why in hell did you want that trunk so bad yesterday?"

"Why did you want it?"

"You raised my back hairs. It was Miller's by rights. You know damn well you didn't have any official hold on it."

"The sheriff has it now, if you want it."

"Charlie Drake?" A crooked smile crossed Hackett's face. "Well," he said, "maybe so." He wiped sweat-caked dust from his angular brow. "Got to be getting on after my beef."

"Isn't it a little north of your leases?"

"Few strays get over the line. You know."

"More than a few."

"Don't take too big a bite, Lee. A man can only chew so much." He sent Cristina a sharp glance. "Did it ever occur to you, Lee, that you might be getting sucked into something?"

"It's pretty evident what I'm getting into, Clay."

"Is it now?" Hackett gathered his reins, emitting a rueful little snort. "You're a damn fool, Lee."

"Am I?"

Staring at Banner, Arles took a last drag on his smoke. Then he pinched it out between his thumb and forefinger and dropped it. "Yes," he said. "You are."

Hackett laughed. Arles glanced at him. Hackett spat. They lifted their reins and necked their horses around and spurred them into a gallop. Banner and the girl sat silently till the men were out of sight.

"Did you see how Arles was watching you?" she asked. "He never took his eyes off."

"I saw."

"Do you think he knows, Lee?"

"That I know he killed Wright?" Banner asked. "Maybe."

Chapter Six

The Gambler

THEY rode on down the canyon. The sunlight waned from the narrow strip of sky above and the shadows darkened and Banner found himself looking over his shoulder more and more often. And finally he pulled up, angry with himself, while he searched the canyon walls until he saw a bench. He rode toward it and scrambled his horse up the ledge that led to the top and Cristina followed him. They sat their blowing animals behind a screen of junipers for a while, watching the canyon below.

"Is there any other way he could follow us?" Banner asked.

"No. If he is following us he will have to come by horseback down this canyon."

They waited. The horses fiddled beneath them.

"Let's go. If he was coming he'd have showed up by now."

They rode steadily northward, with the rocky walls rising against the sky above them. Finally Banner pulled up again.

"Am I just jumpy?"

"We could climb a mesa. We could see some distance from there."

"We'd better."

He started to wheel his horse. The shot made a deafening smash. His horse reared and he pitched off the rump.

Hitting hard, with the breath knocked from him, rolling over, he heard Cristina's animal grunt, heard the sudden clatter of its hoofs as it broke into a wild run down the canyon. He kept rolling over, dazed, knowing only that he had to gain some sort of cover. There was another shot. Sand kicked up three feet to his right. He kept rolling till a scrubby juniper stopped him. He flattened beneath its thick branches.

He could hear the sound of the horses down the canyon. It faded, died. He was no longer dazed. The pain was coming. His head was beginning to ache, his whole back throbbed. He got his six-shooter out.

He shifted over to one side, trying to see the rim. But dusk was thickening, rapidly becoming night. He hunted for a way up to the top that would not leave him open. He found it, finally, a fissure, choked with brush. He began to crawl toward it. He thought he saw motion above, and stopped. He was sweating.

When nothing happened he moved on. He reached the fissure and began the climb. It seemed to grow lighter as he rose. He reached the top to find that twilight still turned the sky pearly up there, while the canyon bottoms were black as ink.

The mesa spread out to the east, yellow with flowering greasewood. Erosion had turned it to a labyrinth of shallow gullies. Beginning to work his way down one of these, he heard a horse snort.

It stopped him sharply. It had seemed to come from his right. He took a chance, worked his way to the top of the gully. The greasewood was knee-high here, so thick he could not see through it. He bellied down and began a snakelike passage across the sandy flat. The horse snorted again, closer, but still to his right. He started to veer that way when the other sound came. It was a soft click. It sounded like a cocked gun.

He stopped, trying to cover his breathing. The click had come from his left, and ahead. Was he taking a direction that would put him between the man and the horse?

Carefully, he eared back the hammer on his own gun. Then he began to crawl again, more slowly, more painstakingly. Finally he reached the edge of another shallow gully, which ran out to the wall of the main chasm.

At the mouth of the gully, behind the rocks, looking down into the canyon, crouched the man. His figure made a vague silhouette. The silver bow guard on his wrist, the silver conchas on his belt gave off a dull glitter in the last of the twilight. But the weapon in his hands was no bow. It was a Winchester, with its lever pulled out to half-cock. Banner finally made out the edges of his hair, against the coppery sheen of his flesh. It was long hair, uncut, and Banner knew he could not use English.

"*Taadoo nahi nani*," he said. "Stand still."

The Indian stiffened. Then, slowly, he turned his head, till he could see Banner, holding the gun on him. After a long moment, he let his Winchester slide to the ground.

Cautiously, Banner made his way down into the gully, moved toward the Indian. The man was young, maybe twenty. He was naked to the waist, wearing only buckskin leggings, a pair of Apache war moccasins, curling up at the toes. He turned to Banner, the whites of his eyes gleaming like marble in the growing night. Banner tried some more Navaho on him. The Indian would not answer. Then Banner heard the rustling in the lower canyon, and he moved forward, keeping his gun on the Indian, till he could make out the shadowy movement below. Two horses, only one ridden.

"Cristina?"

"Lee? My horse ran away. Are you all right?"

"I've got our bushwhacker. Stay down there."

He jerked his gun back into the gully; the Navaho started walking and he followed, till they reached the horses. There were three of them, one with a pack slung over its back. Banner got their lead ropes, then went back to the edge of the gully with the Indian. It became a fissure, crawling down the canyon wall, slanting enough to take the horses. Banner slapped them on the rumps and they began scrambling down, squealing angrily. Then he picked up the Winchester, followed the Indian down after them. Cristina rounded the animals up as they hit the bottom. She dismounted when they were quieted, coming forward to meet Banner as he slid into the sandy flats after the Indian.

"*Ahalani, tineh.*" Greetings, young man.

The Indian did not answer. Cristina tried again, asking his name. "*Haash yinilege?*"

For a while, Banner thought he would not answer this either. Then, sullenly, "*Nishtli Adakhai.*"

"He says he is Adakhai," she told Banner. "It means The Gambler. I know him now. He comes from Chin Lee. He is the most famous gambler on the Reservation. He is also known for his hatred of whites."

"No wonder he won't talk to me. Ask him why he shot at us."

She spoke to the Indian again. He answered, a long speech, with angry gestures. Finally she said, "He says he did not shoot at us. He has been south,

hunting, and was riding home. He heard the shots and came to find out what they meant."

"Do you believe him?"

"I don't know. He is one of the wild ones, who will not adopt the ways of the white man. Most of them at Chin Lee are that kind."

"Would they know about a stranger?"

"No stranger could pass through this country without their knowledge."

"Then let's go on up there with him."

"It might be dangerous, Lee. If they all feel against the white men as this one does—"

"And yet they might be the very ones who could help save your father. We've got to go, Cristina."

Banner was reluctant to give Adakhai his rifle back, but Cristina asked him if he would use it if they returned it, and he said no. He did not want to take them to his clan, but Cristina told him they would go anyway, she knew where it was. Sullenly, the Indian mounted one of his animals, picked up the lead rope, started down the canyon. They left it in a short while, breaking onto a desert bounded on the south by a great rock-ribbed escarpment that seemed to run endlessly to the east. They followed the base of this wall, riding behind Adakhai. Cristina dropped back.

"Did you notice his horses?"

"Hard to see anything in this light."

"One of them is a bay."

Banner looked at her sharply. Then he heeled his horse into a trot, trying to catch up with Adakhai's spares, trying to see if they were shod. But it was too dark. He heard the ring of shoes against rocks, didn't know which horse had made it.

Then the darkness was spattered with light.

It came from ahead, winking, dying, at a half-dozen points. It finally became the wavering plumes of cookfires. The Indian shouted something. The fires were blotted out by the fluttering passage of running figures, swiftly gathering around Adakhai and Cristina and Banner. There were a few women in velvet tunics, voluminous skirts. The men were all thin and stringy, the copper of their bodies grayed with caked dust. Few of them wore shirts, their pants were buckskin, some only wore G-strings.

With a soft rustle of moccasins in the sand, a slight tinkle of heavy hand-hammered silver, they were gathering. None of them spoke. None of them smiled. Cristina sat straight in her saddle, eyes moving slowly through their ranks.

Adakhai had slid off his pony and was unlashing the carcass of a deer. A pair of boys helped him, and he spoke to them in short, thumping gutturals.

An old man was shouldering through the other people now. He was short and squat and bowlegged, with stringy gray hair and a scarred face. He halted before Cristina, speaking in a guttural voice.

"*Ahalani, cikeh.*"

"*Xozo naxasi, natani. Sa ah hayai bikehozoni.*"

She called him chief. Called him *natani*, and wished him long life and happiness. His eyes glittered, staring at Banner. He waved at the cookpots, inviting them to eat.

Cristina stepped off her horse, and Banner put his weight into the left stirrup, hesitating just a moment, and then swung down. They stepped back for him, a stirring of moccasins, a

tinkling of silver. It was like stepping into a den of wild beasts. The smell of wildness was so strong, so rancid, he almost gagged on it.

He looked at Cristina, and she nodded at the saddles. He stripped the sweat-sodden gear from both animals, carried it to the fire. Then he led the two jaded beasts to the picket lines behind the *hogans.*

These were not the logs-stacked-up houses he was so used to. They were the more primitive type of dwellings. They were the forked-together-house whose form and structure had been handed down by the Talking God.

The Indians were shifting restlessly around the fires. None of them seated themselves until Banner returned and lowered himself cross-legged on a sheepskin by Cristina. She was handed a dish of Pueblo pottery. He was handed a dish. From a communal pot stew was ladled out. One by one the men began to seat themsleves. Watching with those smoldering eyes. They ate silently, watching.

"I told you it would be bad," Cristina said in a low voice. "This is a wild clan. This last year has made it worse. They cannot understand why the government gave some of their land to the railroad that way. I see many of the Talk In Blanket clan. I heard they came north by wagon after being forced off their land in the Corn River bottoms."

"That wasn't the government's fault," he said. "Hackett brought pressure to bear in the Bureau."

"It does not matter. All these people can see is that their treaty has been violated."

She began eating once more. Sitting cross-legged beside him, eating the stew with her hands, licking the grease off her fingers. She seemed to take on the primitive savagery of these people. When she was finally finished, she put the plate down. She looked at the chief, around the circle of gleaming bronze faces. Then she made a ceremonial gesture with one arm.

"Di banaxosinini. Toaxei Mexican Hat, Hosteen Jahzini la yah abi dolte . . ."

Of this you have been told. At the place called Mexican Hat, Old Man Black Ears has been put in jail—

Banner followed it that far, but she was speaking so swiftly that he soon began to lose it. After she finished, the chief spoke to her, and then turned and spoke to some of the others. It went along too fast for Banner to get more than a vague idea of what they were talking about. Some of the others began answering, sullenly, warily. Then Cristina asked the chief something. He answered. Cristina looked quickly at Adakhai, and asked something. It stopped there.

"They have seen no strangers," Cristina said. "I asked if any of them had been as far south as Yellow Gap. The chief said Adakhai had hunted down that way."

"And Adakhai wouldn't answer?"

"I asked him if he had been through Yellow Gap. He was silent."

"Did you explain we were looking for an eyewitness to Wright's killing? That it would save your father's life?"

"I explained that. They are not convinced that you have truth in the heart. They say how can I trust you when you work for Henry Dodge, who will prosecute the case? These are the wild ones, Lee. They do not understand. I think we can find no more this way. I will be sleeping with the women in the *hogans* tonight. Perhaps I can

learn more from them."

The crowd began to disperse. The women washed the dishes, the kettle, the few utensils in sand. Half a dozen of the men began playing *conquian* with Mexican cards. A few rolled out their sheepskin pallets by the fires and lay down. Cristina was taken to a hogan by a pair of old women. Banner was left alone, with Adakhai sitting across the fire, staring at him from those smoldering eyes.

He built a cigarette, offered it to the Indian. Adakhai rose and walked away. Banner lit the cigarette and smoked it himself. Then, despite his tension, the weariness of the long ride began to creep over him. More men were sprawling on their pallets now, the fires were dying. He unrolled his army blankets, put one under, one on top. He turned on his side and met the unwinking eyes of a Navaho lying on a sheepskin five feet from him. He turned the other way. The Navaho on that side was sitting up, watching. He turned on his back, staring at the sky. Even the stars seemed to be watching.

He smoked the cigarette down, put it out. The breathing around him gathered volume, grew stertorous. The card game broke up and the men rolled in. Still he could not sleep. Adakhai's bay horse was on his mind again.

The Indian had been south hunting. Had just returned. That could mean he had been there during the week of the murder. When they asked him about Yellow Gap he had refused to answer. It all fitted in. But the bay horse on the rim of Yellow Gap had been shod. If Adakhai's horse was shod—

The impulse ran through Banner so strongly that he almost rolled over. He knew the chance he would be taking. If they caught him, and misinterpreted it, there was no telling what they would do. Yet he had to take it. Adakhai was already suspicious. If he was really the one, and did not want it known, he might get rid of the horse during the night.

One by one Banner slipped his boots off. Then he listened again. He rolled to one side and stared around the circle of men, dark mounds in the moonlight. All of them seemed asleep.

He slid from his blankets, rolled to hands and knees. A man flopped over. Banner froze. The man settled back, snoring.

Banner crawled away from the blanketed bodies into the night, behind the forked-together houses. The horses were picketed here. They shied nervously, began shifting around, snorting as he came to his feet among them. In the moonlight, he moved through the animals, seeking the bay. At last, near the end of the lines, he found it.

The horse tried to sidle away from him but he followed it to the end of its rope and caught it there, murmuring to it, soothing it, till he had the animal quiet. He put his weight against the horse, shifting it off balance, and then bent to lift its right front leg.

There was no shoe. The hoof looked strange. Its heel was pinched, the frog squeezed in. But there was no shoe.

He dropped the hoof and straightened with the sense of fluttering motion from the *hogans*. The horses began snorting and running on their picket ropes. Then he wheeled, with the shocking surprise of the shape hurtling out of darkness upon him, and the guttural shout:

"*Tchindi—!*"

The body came so heavily into him that he stumbled backward, falling.

He had the instantaneous impression of moonlight making a glittering sliver of something above his head and all he could do was throw his arm up to block it as it came down.

He hit on his back, a stunning blow, with the man spraddled above him. Breath knocked out of him, he felt the shift of the body, heard the grunt as the man struck again. He jerked aside. The knife ripped his collar, dug hilt-deep into the earth by his ear.

The man's face was a foot above Banner's. It was Adakhai. Banner hit him with an upflung elbow. Adakhai's head jerked back. Banner caught his wrist in both hands and used it as a lever to heave the Indian over.

He rolled on top, still holding the knife wrist in both hands. He twisted it, heard the Indian shout in pain. But before he could get enough leverage to make Adakhai drop the knife, the man lunged up beneath him.

The tigerish fury in the narrow body shocked him. He couldn't retain his wristlock and stay on top. Too late he let go. He was already pitching over.

Adakhai came on top of him. Smashed him full in the face with his free fist. The stunning pain of it incapacitated Banner. Dimly he saw Adakhai raise the knife to drive it down. Tried to jerk over. Couldn't.

Then the Indian gave a great shout. His weight was torn from Banner. A shrill voice was screaming something. Banner rolled over, dazedly, onto his hands and knees. He saw a slim figure writhing with Adakhai on the ground, shouting.

"*I-chai—tchindi—juthla hago ni—*" Cristina.

Adakhai rolled her over, tore free, tried to come to his feet and lunge at Banner again. The girl caught at him. Banner saw her hand flash before Adakhai's face. Saw the four parallel stripes leap into Adakhai's face, from brow to jaw.

The Indian shouted in pain, eyes squinted shut, and reeled back. By then Banner had gained his feet, shaking his head to clear it. Running figures were pouring in between the *hogans* now. A pair of them blocked Adakhai off as he tried to lunge at Banner again.

The chief ran between Adakhai and Banner, a squat, froglike shape in the moonlight. The others gathered around. Adakhai stopped fighting, held by the two men. He was trembling with rage.

"What was it?" Cristina panted. "What were you doing?"

"The bay," Banner told her. "I had to see its feet."

"Lee!" Her eyes were wide and dark with anger. "Why could you not wait? Why must you always do things without thinking—?"

"I couldn't wait," he said. "Adakhai was suspicious. If he's the one he might have gotten the horse away tonight—"

She shook her head, mouth twisted. "But this was the worst way you could have done it. He was probably watching you. He must think you were trying to steal the horse."

Defeat left a sick taste in his mouth. "Try to make him understand, Cristina. I was only doing it to help your father."

She shook her head, eyes squinted almost shut. "It will not help. I doubt if you will ever learn anything from them now. You have violated—"

The chief cut her off with an angry gesture, turning to speak to Banner.

"He says he is very angry with you," Cristina told Banner. "They all hate you. He says you must go."

Banner's shoulders sagged. "What about you?"

"They will not let me go off with you at night, a white man. They will take me back to my home tomorrow."

"You'll be all right?"

"These are my people, Lee."

As he turned to go, he saw Adakhai's eyes. They glittered like a naked blade in the moonlight.

Chapter Seven

Leave-taking

BANNER did not go far that night. He was too played out. He found a *tchindi hogan* about four miles from the Indian camp and slept there, knowing he would be safe, for no Navaho would approach a building in which someone had died.

It took him all of the next day to get back to Mexican Hat. He reached the house sodden with fatigue and turned his horse into one of the stalls in back, forking out hay and dropping his saddle beneath the *ramada* where all the rigging was kept.

There was a light in the parlor and he heard Dodge's soft laugh. Going down the hall, he felt a rush of warmth. How many times had he come in like that to hear the old reprobate chuckling over some ironic twist of a case in Chitty or Coke?

"Henry?"

There was the creak of a hide-seated chair, the sound of boots on hard-packed adobe. "Lee. Where in the devil have you been?"

"Up to Chin Lee, Henry. Trying to turn up the eyewitness to the killing—"

"The eyewitness!"

"We found his tracks out at Yellow Gap that time. A man on a bay horse who saw the murder."

"Now, son, this isn't the time to talk about—"

"It can't wait," Banner said. "I think I've found the witness. An Indian boy named Adakhai. He was down there hunting during the week of the murder. He has a bay horse. When—"

He broke off, as the other figure was silhouetted in the doorway. Dodge made an apologetic gesture.

"I told you it wasn't the time to talk about it, Lee."

"Go ahead," Julia Wright said. Her voice had a strained sound. "Did this Adakhai say he'd seen Jahzini murder my father?"

"You know I'm not trying to convict Jahzini," Banner said. "I think he's innocent, and I'll prove it."

"By stealing my father's trunk and going through his papers?" Her voice was bitter.

"Julia, I had to do that. I'm sorry, but I had to. Did Henry tell you about the letter I found?"

"That's exactly what I came here for tonight. You got those papers under false pretenses. Claude Miller says the only one with authority to impound them is the sheriff. This whole thing is so stupid. The case against that old Indian is open and shut, and here a man right in the prosecutor's office is trying to mess the whole thing up. Lee—I—"

She broke off, with a sound of utter exasperation. Then she turned, tight-lipped, and walked across the living-room, snatching her cloak from a chair. She had opened the front door

and stepped outside before Banner caught up with her. He grasped her arm, pulling her back around.

"Julia, this isn't like you at all. Would it help your father, now, to kill an innocent man for his murder?"

"But he isn't innocent. All the evidence against him—"

"Is as circumstantial as the evidence I've found defending him," he said.

She started to fight—then the tension went out of her suddenly and she sagged against him.

"Oh, don't go over it again, Lee. I'm so tired, so confused. You're the only one who could really give me any help and here you are fighting me—"

She broke off, leaning heavily against him, and turned her face up. He felt all the anger drain from him. He dipped his head to hers and held her against him and kissed her.

For a moment she met it with the old passion, her body straining against his. Then he sensed the subtle change. Her lips altered their shape, grew stiff and unyielding, slid off his mouth. It brought her cheek against his chest, with her face hidden from him.

"You're not still angry with me, Julia?"

"No."

"Then what is it, between us, Julia?"

"Nothing, Lee. Nothing!"

"There is something." He caught her chin in a cupped hand, forcing her eyes up to his. "I always thought it was something in your past. You came from Denver three years ago. Every man in Mexican Hat started buzzing around. You wouldn't have anything to do with them for months. Then, suddenly, the barriers came down. For a while I didn't know whether it would be Hackett or Elder or me."

She fingered his lapel, pouting. "You knew there was never any question."

"But even then you wouldn't talk about Denver," he said. "It always chilled things to bring it up. Was it a man, back in Denver?"

She tried to pull away. "Lee, please—"

"It's got to be something like that, Julia. I keep feeling it, between us."

"Lee, will you stop it, will you stop it! I can't talk about anything like that now. There's nothing. It's all in your mind. Please don't, please—"

He held her tight, eyes turned bleakly to the darkness beyond. "I'm sorry. Maybe I'm wrong."

Her breathing seemed to abate, she was quiescent in his arms a moment, her full body softly molded to him. She spoke so low he could hardly hear.

"You'll come to see me tomorrow evening, then?"

"If I can. We'll probably be in court during the day. That Morgan litigation."

"And you won't go riding all over the country like that?" She tilted her head up when he did not speak. "There must be a hundred men with a bay horse around here, Lee. A dozen of them could have passed through Yellow Gap during that time."

The expression on his face stopped her. She grasped his hands tightly.

"Lee—you won't—"

"How can I promise that?" he said stiffly.

A dull red flush crept up her neck, into her face. She stepped back, out of his arms. "Maybe you hadn't better come to see me tomorrow night, Lee."

Dodge was sitting in his big leather chair by the fireplace when Banner came back in.

"Clear things up?" he asked.

"No," Banner said emptily. He shook his head. "Her hatred of Jahzini seems so blind, Henry."

"She's had a shock, Lee. Give her time to get over it."

Banner lowered himself into a chair, staring moodily at the floor. "I suppose you're right."

"Yes." Dodge heaved himself up and went to the ivory-topped table. He pulled open the drawer and shoved aside the ancient Dragoon Colt he kept in there, to get at his box of cigars. He bit off the end of a long black smoke and padded over to the fireplace to spit it out. He lit up, rolling it between thumb and forefinger till it was drawing well. Then he cleared his throat.

"Just how much did you get out of this Indian—this Adakhai?"

"I told you the important part."

"Don't you see what flimsy evidence the whole thing would be, son?"

Banner stood up. "We went through that before, Henry. Why do you keep insisting on the technicalities of the case? I've turned up more than enough to cast doubt on Jahzini's guilt."

"All right. I'll admit what you've turned up changes the aspect of the case. But that's as far as I can go, Lee. Even if I accept the cigarette butt and the tracks you found as valid evidence, they aren't conclusive proof to me that Hackett had Wright killed. Hackett just doesn't operate that way."

Banner stared at him a long time. "You've changed in the last years, Henry. I guess I've been working too close with you. I wasn't aware of it. Suddenly you look older."

"We all get older, Lee."

"And as we get older, Henry, do we get more afraid? Does our job, our position, get to mean so much to us that we can't face anything which might endanger them?"

"Son—" Dodge said it sharply, rocking his weight forward. Then he stopped, staring wide-eyed at Banner, the blood darkening his face. At last he settled back, the choleric anger mingling with a look of helplessness.

Banner forced himself to go on. "Jahzini doesn't have money for a lawyer. I understand the court's assigned Farris, from Flagstaff."

Dodge seemed to dredge it up with great effort. "Yes."

"I know how Farris feels about Indians. I certainly wouldn't feel safe having it in his hands." Banner frowned intensely at the floor. "Farris wouldn't be needed, if Jahzini already had a lawyer, would he?"

Dodge held out his hand. "Lee—son—"

"It's got to be that way," Banner said, in a strained voice. "I've got to take the case, Henry. I've even got to leave this house—"

Dodge grasped his arm. "You'll ruin your whole career this way. You don't have enough evidence to win the case, son. Lose it and you'll never get a private practice in this town. The feeling's too intense—"

"That's why I've got to move out of your house, Henry. The Indians know you're prosecuting the case. I'll never get anything out of them as long as they think I'm still with you."

A stricken look filled Dodge's eyes. When he finally spoke, his voice was rusty and trembling with suppressed rage.

"I guess you're right. You'd better go."

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Drylander

AZTEC STREET ran six blocks southward from Courthouse Square, then dipped into Gayoso Wash, becoming no more than a wagon road, and ran three blocks more to the railroad. In these three blocks was the Mexican section of town. At the street called *Calle de los Leperos*, Banner turned off Aztec, riding between sagging spindle fences that surrounded dark dooryards.

Banner's portmanteau was on the rump of his horse and he was still sick from leaving Dodge under these circumstances. He realized his own anger had led him to hurt the old man, to express suspicions he wouldn't have put into words if he had stopped to think.

He drew his horse up sharply as a screaming voice burst from one of the adobes farther down the alley. A woman's voice, shrill, vitriolic, cursing in Spanish.

"*Tu bribon, se las tendra que haber con ella papa, lo agarro con su manos en la masa—*"

There was the crash of crockery, a man's voice shouting wildly, "*Madre Dios*, what are you make—?"

Light blossomed from a door flung open. The man's figure was silhouetted in the yellow rectangle, squat, bow-legged, primitive. A dish hit him and broke all over his skull. He howled and ducked low, wrapping his arms around his head. A clay jug spun over him and struck the street and shattered.

"*Vayase con la musica a otra parte*," screamed the woman.

The man was running toward Banner, the woman was silhouetted in the door, heaving another plate. It spun by and smashed against a wall. Other doors were opening, people were shouting ribald advice, laughing. The man wheeled into a cross alley. Banner reined the horse in after him. At the other end of the alley, the man came to a halt, puffing.

"So she caught you redhanded," Banner said.

The man brushed pottery from his hair, muttering angrily. "I was just show Carmilla how they do it in Durango. She tell me her mother won't be home till midnight. What a little liar."

"So you'll have her father to answer to."

"Is that what the old witch she was shouting? What an old *bruja—*" Tilfego broke off, turning. "*Amigo!* I thought was the voice of my conscious."

"Conscience."

"*Si.* Conscious."

"How about bunking with you?"

"Is pleasure." Tilfego rubbed at the back of his neck, staring up at Banner. "So you're going to defend Jahzini. And Henry Dodge he has kick you out."

"Is it that clear?"

"Your bag you got. I see it coming a long time. You cannot have the blame for Henry. Even I can see that you do not have enough evidence for the court."

The Mexican's two-room adobe was farther up the Street of the Beggars. They turned Banner's horse into the spindle corral out back and went into the house. While Tilfego lit a candle Banner slumped wearily on the bed, head in his hands, and told Tilfego

about Chin Lee, about finding the pinched heel and squeezed frog on Adakhai's bay. Tilfego agreed that it might mean the horse had been recently shod, for that condition usually developed from poor shoeing. The Mexican had seen no sign of the bad frog in the tracks at Yellow Gap. However, it was possible that the condition had developed after the Indian had been to Yellow Gap, and he had subsequently removed the shoes to let the hoof get better. It gave Banner a little hope.

He slept like a dead man that night, not waking till ten the next morning. Tilfego was out back, currying Banner's chestnut. They went into town for breakfast. There was not much movement on Reservation at this hour. Banner was about to cross the street with Tilfego when he saw the wagon coming in from the east.

It was like the shock of a blow at the pit of his stomach. Jeremiah Mills was driving the wagon, and one of the horses in his team was a bay.

Tilfego put a hand on Banner's arm. "You jump too quick again, Lee. I thought that was too easy, ride out over the week-end and find everything."

"But it all pointed to that Indian—"

"You did not really think you would be that lucky."

Banner's shoulders sagged. "I guess not. Mills is north of the tracks, isn't he?"

"Way north."

"And he'd have to come through Yellow Gap to get to town. Is that a cinch sore on the bay?"

"Looks like it. She has been under saddle, and not too long ago."

Mills pulled into the rack before Price's Mercantile, climbing slowly out of the wagon. He was tall, gaunt, with the chronic stoop of the dryland farmer in his heavy shoulders. He shambled into the store.

Banner and Tilfego walked the half-block to the Mercantile, and Tilfego squatted down to study the hoofs of the horse, lifting one at a time.

"Same size as that one at Yellow Gap."

"Could this be the one?" Banner asked eagerly.

"Hard to say. The one at Yellow Gap have little dent on rear hind shoe. This one she is smooth."

"Riding over a lot of talus could have ground it down."

"Maybe." Tilfego rose.

Mills came through the door with a fifty-pound sack of flour on one shoulder. The man glanced dourly at Banner and lowered the sack into the bed of the wagon.

"That's a pretty bay," Banner said.

Mills leaned against the wagon. "She ain't good for nothin'," he said. "So lame I can't ride her."

"You ain't had her long?" Tilfego asked.

"Not long. Victor Kitteridge owed me some money for alfalfa. He couldn't pay it. I needed a wagon horse so I took the bay instead."

Banner stepped close to him. "You know Wallace Wright was murdered in Yellow Gap last Thursday, Mills. That same day a man on a bay horse rode through the gap. We have every reason to believe he saw the killing."

The first shock left Mills's face blank. Then his eyes narrowed. "I didn't have this horse then."

"I can check with Kitteridge easily enough."

"Go ahead, damn you." The man turned to climb into the wagon.

"Are you *that* afraid of Hackett?"

It stopped Mills, with his hand on the wagon. He turned to look at Banner again, surprise in his eyes. Then something else filled them, almost a look of pain, and they swung away, and he lifted his foot to climb in. Banner stepped up beside him and put a hand on the side of the wagon. It blocked Mills from stepping up. The man stared down at Banner's arm.

"Take it away, Lee. I'll bust you open like a sack."

"Will you, Mills?" Banner asked softly.

The man continued to look at the arm for a long time. Without looking up, he spoke, his voice strained and husky.

"What do you want?"

"I always thought hard work put that stoop in your shoulders, Mills," Banner said. "But that isn't it. You're afraid. You've been afraid so long you've forgotten what it's like to give a man a good punch in the nose. Five years ago it was another big man you were afraid of, back in Missouri or Arkansas or wherever it was. Now it's Clay Hackett."

The man settled slowly, heavily against the wagon, letting a husky breath flow out of him, staring at Banner's arm without seeing it. Finally the words began to creep out, not directed at Banner, or at anybody in particular, just words.

"We were a long time getting this place. I owned two farms back in Missouri. I was flooded out. Owned one in Ohio. Crop failure lost me the mortgage. Homesteaded in Wyoming. The Johnson County War finished that. I guess I've squatted in a dozen places between here and there. Sometimes the cattlemen squeezed me out, sometimes the land failed me. It digs into a man to lose that many times, Banner. It digs into a man."

"And if it wasn't for Hackett, now, you couldn't even stay where you are."

Mills's head lowered. "He could kick me out if he wanted to. I had squatter's rights on that land. Even the government recognized them till the railroad come through and they gave it alternate sections along the right of way. My land fell in one of those sections. The railroad leased it to Hackett. I know cattlemen, Banner. Ninety-nine out of a hundred would have kicked me off. He's let me stay."

"Your land runs right across the northern end of the railroad section, doesn't it? Ever had trouble with the Indians?"

"A dozen times. You know that."

"Don't you see what a buffer you make for Hackett, Mills? He's using graze he'd have to fight the Indians for if you weren't there. All the reports that come in have you in trouble with the Indians in that section, not Hackett."

Mills stared intently at him, mouth working faintly. Then he shook his head.

"Don't try to twist this around, Banner."

Banner felt a frown pull his brows in. "I hadn't realized before how many people in this town were under Hackett's thumb. How can you live on your knees all the time, Mills? I'd vomit."

"You never had a family, did you, Banner?"

Banner looked into Mills's eyes. It was like looking at a hundred years of bitterness, pain, defeat.

"All right, Mills," he said.

The man stared at him a moment longer, then started to wheel and climb into the wagon. He checked him-

self, looking beyond Banner. His face took on a color of old putty.

"You aren't going to believe everything the counselor says, are you, Mills?" Hackett asked.

Banner wheeled to see the man standing on the sidewalk, behind the hitchrack. He had his thumbs hooked in his gun belt and his feet planted wide.

Mills licked his lips. "I mind my own business, Hackett. You know that."

"Sure you do," Hackett said.

"I was just leaving," Mills said.

"Sure you were," Hackett said.

The Owensboro creaked as Mills stepped up, settled himself on the seat, shoulders deeply stooped. The little bay snorted, wheeled with the other horse as Mills reined them around.

"This Adakhai," Hackett said. "Do you really think he saw the murder?"

Banner's voice was bitter. "Does Henry run to you with everything?"

"Haven't seen your uncle in several days," Hackett said. "I dropped in on Julia last night, though. Must have been after she'd seen you. She was right upset, had to let it out on somebody. Do you really think that Indian will testify against a man of his own race?"

"If he testifies, it won't be against Jahzini."

"Won't it now?" Hackett lowered his head till his sardonic black eyes were barely visible. "Well," he said absently, "maybe not." He glanced beyond Banner, at something down the street. "Maybe not." He turned and walked toward Blackstrap Kelly's, his spurs setting up a jingling clatter in the quiet street.

"He sure like to drag them cartwheels," Tilfego observed.

Banner turned to see what Hackett had looked at. Arles was sitting his horse near the corner of Aztec and Reservation. He met Banner's gaze for a moment, then reined the horse around and rode toward the desert.

They ate breakfast at one of the Mexican cantinas, and then Banner went back to Tilfego's house to get some paper and pencils from his bag. He went to the extreme west end of town first, meaning to work eastward. The station was the last building on Reservation. From his cubbyhole of a ticket booth, Si Warner saw Banner coming, and turned back into the waiting-room. Banner and Tilfego followed him in. The man had his back turned and was assiduously sweeping out beneath the seats.

"When I was a kid," Banner said, "you used to tell me stories about the time you were an engineer."

"Don't make it hard on me, Lee. Blackstrap Kelly's my friend too. I got to eat my meals there every day. I got to drink his liquor if I want to see my other friends."

"I knew the feeling was bad in town, Si. I didn't know that it extended to you."

"Damn it, Lee." The man shook his head exasperatedly. "Everybody in town knows you're goin' to defend Jahzini. Dodge's cook heard you and you know what a gossip she is. Feeling's high on Reservation Street and you're goin' to run smack into it. Like this rumor that some Injuns are goin' to try and bust Jahzini out of jail. A lot of men are sayin' we should hang Jahzini before they can try anything.

Caleb Elder said anybody that defended Jahzini ought to be hung too."

"Let me hear him say it," Tilfego growled. "I'll string him up by his thumbs—"

"Elder's got a right," Si said. "Some Injuns burnt out his Cherry Creek line camp last night."

"I've still got to ask you some questions, Si. Did you see Jeremiah Mills in town on June the twelfth?"

"Can't recall."

"If I have to bring you into court, Si, and you lie, they can jail you for perjury."

"Dammit, Lee, I still didn't see him."

"Victor Kitteridge, then."

"Seems so," Warner said, reluctantly.

"Riding a bay?"

"Seems it was that hammerheaded roan of his."

"What time, Si?"

"How the hell can I remember all that? Morning, I think. I don't know—"

After Si, it was Sam Price. And then Blackstrap Kelly. And all along the way, he met the same resentment, the same withdrawal, the same anger. But he persisted, and by the end of the day, he had gotten down to Fifth Street. He had filled five sheets of paper on both sides. He had the names of seven different people who had been in town from the north country during the day of the murder. Five of them were Indians known to the townsfolk, but none of these had ridden a bay. The other two were whites, Caleb Elder and Victor Kitteridge.

Of the eight people who remembered Kitteridge being in town that day, three thought he had been riding a buckskin, two remembered a hammerheaded roan, one thought it might have been a bay, if it wasn't a chestnut.

Chapter Nine

A Thousand Years

BANNER ate at Tilfego's that night, and went to bed right after the meal, dead tired. It seemed only a second before he was awakened. He lay in the bunk, staring around him, with the sense of having been shaken. He was surprised to see dawn filling the room with a milky light.

"Somebody belch big?" Tilfego asked.

"It wake you up too?" Banner said. He heard somebody calling from next door, something about an explosion. He sat up sharply, throwing the covers off.

"What you make?"

"I'm going to see about it."

Something was working in Banner, an apprehension, a premonition. He dressed, slipped into his coat, even buckled on his Colt. Then he went outside. A few people stood in the squalid lane.

"Que pasa?" Banner asked.

"No sé," a man said. *"Un explosion, al norte—"*

To the north? Banner went to the corral and saddled up his chestnut, the premonition still tugging at him. He could hear Tilfego snoring again, from inside. He turned down the street to Aztec, then up toward Reservation. Little knots of people were gathering on the corners.

A thin trickle of them was moving up the street. A buggy passed Banner, going hard. He was almost to Reservation, now, could see the crowd around the courthouse. Sam Price came running from the alley between Reserva-

tion and First, a six-shooter in one hand.

"He's not down there," he shouted. "Carey's starting a search of the houses now."

"Somebody said he got a horse down on Second," another man called. "He'll head north for sure. What the hell is that sheriff doing?"

Banner pulled up on the fringe of the crowd around the jail, saw Blackstrap Kelly. "What happened, Kelly?"

"Somebody blew up the jail safe. Jahzini got out the hole."

Banner swung down and shouldered his way through the men. The splintery cedar door was wide open, there were more men inside, examining the blackened hole in the back wall of the office. The safe had been knocked over on its side by the explosion, the heavy door bent open like a piece of tin. Charlie Drake was down on his hunkers, pawing through what was left of the papers. He gave a tremendous wheeze, coming to his feet. He had a few burned pieces of paper in his hand, and Wright's saddlebags.

"That's all I can find," he said. "The rest must have been burned up. I had a lot of exhibits on that Johnson case, too."

"You're wasting a helluva lot of valuable time," somebody said hoarsely. "Let's get after him."

"We'll get after him," Drake said. "Somebody can go get them Papago trackers for me right now. I can use a dozen men in the posse. I'll deputize the first twelve of you that come back with a horse and two spares, two five-gallon canteens, and food for three days."

There was an eddying shift around Banner as the men started going out. He stepped past Judge Prentice, speaking to Drake.

"That cigarette butt is gone?"

"Hello, Lee. What cigarette butt?"

"The exhibit Dodge gave you Saturday."

"Oh." Drake wiped the wrinkled back of his hand across a ruddy nose. "I guess it is. This is all I found."

"And Wright's letter?"

"I told you." Drake held up the saddlebags. "This is about all anybody could recognize."

Judge Prentice irritably pulled his coat shut over his nightshirt. "I don't see how they got in to do it in the first place, Drake. It looks like willful negligence to me."

"I don't think you can blame Drake, Judge," Kelly said. "Somebody started a fight in the alley back of my place. Drake was the only one on duty over here. He come running with his shotgun."

"Who was it?"

"I didn't catch 'em," Drake said. "The explosion came when I was out back of Kelly's. Time I got back into Reservation, whoever'd done it was gone, Jahzini was gone too." The sheriff waved the saddlebags at the breach behind the safe. "Jahzini's cell was on the other side of that wall. When they blew the safe it made a big enough hole for him to crawl out."

Banner began backing out of the room, into the crowd, getting his horse. At the corner of Aztec, just about to mount, Banner saw three men swing onto Reservation at the next corner. Each one had a saddle roll, a pair of canteens, and two spare horses. And one of them was Big Red.

Banner stepped aboard and kicked the horse into a run, heading eastward out of town. Beyond the last house he pulled the animal down to a walk-can-

ter-trot that kept the miles unraveling behind him without draining the beast completely. His mind was on Big Red, and the implications of that, but he was also calculating how much of a head start he'd have. It would take them twenty minutes to get the Papago trackers, in their camp west of the railroad station. Maybe another ten to deputize the men, to get the group organized. Half an hour. It wasn't much.

The sun was up now and the heat waves were beginning to dance along the buttes. He turned off on the Yellow Gap cut-off, went through the gap itself, rose to the higher land northward. Two hours later he was riding through the mesquite forest south of Jahzini's. Then he rode into the rocky benchlands. An hour of this brought him out of the rough country into the wash where the hogan stood.

Cristina must have heard his oncoming horse, for the wickerwork door was pushed aside, and she stooped through and straightened, a slim figure in her blue velvet tunic and voluminous skirt. He checked the horse before her.

"Your dad's escaped, Cristina. A posse's after him. We haven't got a minute to waste. Is he here?"

"He isn't here, Lee. How—how—"

"Somebody got into the sheriff's office this morning and blew up the safe. It knocked a hole in the wall. Your father got out that way. The only evidence destroyed was the stuff I'd gotten which might have proved your father's innocence."

He could see the fear begin to shine in her eyes. "What are you thinking, Lee? Don't try to spare me."

"Big Red was there," he said. "One of the first to join the posse. Why would he be in town at this time? Hackett needs every man on roundup."

Her eyes grew darker. "My father is liable to get drunk. He always got drunk when he was mixed up about the white men. He has friends all the way up to Corn River. If he gets hold of liquor—"

"That's what I figured too. He'll put up a fight if they catch him—"

"And they will shoot him." There was a dead sound to her voice. "That is what you mean, isn't it? Hackett did this on purpose. He wanted my father to escape, so they could kill him."

"It would clear things up for Hackett," Banner said. "Maybe he was beginning to feel the pressure. To be afraid of what I was turning up. This way, the case would be closed quick. No court battle. No evidence turning up in favor of your dad. Just a posse, a fight, a coroner's inquest."

She frowned. "When Jahzini was in trouble before, he always hid with a friend north of the Corn River. Few know where the place is. It is two days from Mexican Hat, pushing hard. I had better go with you. You could never find it alone."

The old woman had come from the hogan. She seemed to shrink a little when Cristina told her what had happened.

"We will stop by one of my cousin's," Cristina told Banner. "They will come back to take care of her."

He helped her saddle up. Then they rode. Westward the benchlands began lifting upward till they reached a rim that ran northwest for miles and then petered off in ridges shaggy with another mesquite forest.

The sun rolled toward its zenith, turning the sky's turquoise bowl to an arch of blinding brass. Banner was sodden with sweat and giddy with the

heat. They found a trickle of water in a narrow gorge and let their horses drink and drank themselves and then hitched the animals in the shade of scrub oak. Banner settled onto the baked earth, beside the girl.

"Did you find out anything more at Chin Lee?"

She gazed somberly at the stream. "The women knew little. They said Adakhai was one of the really wild boys. His father was killed in one of the fights over grazing trouble. They said Adakhai had been south, and might have been through Yellow Gap on the day of the murder. I tried to speak with him the next day, but he had gone hunting again."

She looked up at him, a wondering expression parting her lips. "When everything was happy, when the world was peaceful, I saw very little of you. How strange that it should take death and pain to bring us together." Then: "Will you come to me—as you go to Julia Wright?"

He almost smiled. Something in her eyes kept him from it.

"Are you jealous of Julia Wright?" he asked.

A fathomless blankness dulled her eyes.

"Why do you look at me like that?" he asked. "Did I say something wrong?"

"Would you say a foot separates us, Lee?"

He smiled wryly. "No more than a foot, certainly."

"A thousand years separates us."

"Cristina—"

"I saw your face up at Chin Lee when you stepped down among those people. They smell like wild animals, don't they? You were stepping down into the past. A man cut off from all he knew, surrounded by people he could never understand."

"That has nothing to do with you."

"They are my people, Lee."

"They may be of your blood. But you've lived among us. You speak our tongue, your mind works like ours—"

"How do you know how my mind works? Does your mind work like an Indian because you lived with us for a year? You proved it did not at Chin Lee. They hated you, yet they gave you hospitality. You violated that. You did not even understand what it would do to Adakhai if he found you with that horse. You will never get his trust now."

"Cristina, please—"

She shook her head, eyes dropping. "It is no use, Lee. You showed me up there how impossible it is that our two races ever understand each other. That thousand years will always stand between us—"

"No!" He caught her arms savagely. "Only a foot separates us. We can cross that right now."

He pulled her toward him, bent his head to hers. There was a silken warmth to her lips. It was a transitory thing, a hint of satiny passion. Then it was gone; she tipped her head back, pushed him away.

He stared down into her face, trying to understand what had happened to him. Looking down at her, still trying to define what was happening within him, he could not help smiling, his rueful quirk of a smile. She reached up to touch his mouth with her fingers.

"When I think of you—I think of that," she said.

She took her hand away suddenly, swiftly, as if from a burn. She stood up and turned around and walked to her horse. He got up and followed her

and took her shoulders in his hands and turned her around. Her eyes were squinted shut and tears were running down her cheeks.

"Cristina–I didn't mean–"

"What didn't you mean?"

He gazed down at the piquant oval of her face, helpless before the turmoil of his own feelings. "I don't know," he said in a low voice. What should a man mean, or not mean, when he suddenly realized that a girl had become a woman? He shook his head wonderingly, still holding her arms.

"At least that thousand years is gone from between us now."

Her head came up. "You still don't see it?"

"Cristina, don't talk that way again–"

"You're right. I shouldn't talk. If you don't see it, talk won't explain."

She twisted away, toed her stirrup. Her skirts flared as she swung up. She wheeled the pinto on down the canyon. He went to his own horse and pulled the latigo tight and stepped aboard and turned to follow her.

Chapter Ten

Blood Brothers

IN THE afternoon they reached Cristina's cousins at Ta Lagai. They came out of the highlands again into the greasewood flats and logs-stacked-up house. As soon as Banner and the girl appeared, there was a call from somewhere, and people began to pop up like ants swarming from the earth. Banner was surrounded by a cacophony of Navaho and English. When an ancient headman had finally quieted them, Cristina looked at Banner.

"Did you understand? Jahzini passed here on his way north. He sneaked in without any of them seeing him and got hold of some liquor and a gun. All the young men have gone south to sell the wool. They couldn't keep Jahzini here and had nobody to send after him when he left by horse."

"Did I catch Drake's name?"

"Sheriff Drake and his posse got here by horseback an hour after Jahzini left. The Papago trackers didn't have any trouble following him on north."

"Then we're too late."

She shook her head. "If Jahzini is going north of Corn River, I know a short cut between here and Turquoise Buttes that might get us ahead of Drake."

She turned to tell the palsied old headman of her mother. He said he would send one of his wives to take care of her. They watered their mounts, then pushed on.

The heat became more intense, sucking moisture from Banner till he was drenched in sweat, yet felt dry as a husk. His eyes ached, his face felt flayed raw, he began to have the sensation of riding in a feverish stupor. The girl accepted it all with expressionless calm.

They topped Turquoise Mesa and rode westward for three miles along its rim and then saw the stain of dust against the steely northern sky.

"That is probably Drake," she said. "It looks like they are heading west. That means they have struck the river and are following it. If we cut straight through these benchlands ahead of us, we might reach Moqui Ford before they do."

It was a cruel stretch, studded with

lava that would have cut a horse to ribbons if a man didn't know the trail. They finally reached the ford. The water was sullen and brassy under an afternoon sun. The stain of dust against the sky was to their right, now, coming toward them, and they knew they had beaten Drake. Cristina took one glance at what looked like the fresh tracks of a shod horse, lining through the sand toward the river. Then she led Banner into the water, slopping across three hundred yards of brazen shallows to the narrow strip of beach on the other side. A great sandstone escarpment rose beyond the beach, ruptured by a single canyon, directly ahead of them. Cristina rode unhesitatingly into this.

It was a narrow gorge, a place of shadows, of silence. Sometimes it was so narrow it scraped Banner's legs. It twisted and turned, back-tracked and looped. Sunset was turning the sky to a bloody stripe between the rocky walls far above them when they began to smell the stench.

A few yards on they found the dead horse. Cristina stared down at it, compassion darkening her eyes.

"Jahzini must have run it all the way through this heat. He would never do a thing like that if he was sober."

They rode another half mile through the narrow chasm, crossing shale where the clatter of their hoofs ran before them. Then Cristina pulled to a halt, staring at the rim above.

"There is a foot trail up here to the mesas. It will take him a mile across them to the northern rim and then down again. It is the shortest way. I think he would use it. If we both go up here he might get away at the other end."

"Could we split up?"

"That's the only way. A half mile on, this canyon opens onto the desert. You turn west along the mesa rim for a mile to where that foot trail comes down again."

"Do you want me to go that way?"

"I had better. You couldn't find where the trail comes down. You'll have to leave your horse here when you go up."

Cristina turned her horse and rode on into the canyon, into the shadows, out of his sight.

He hitched his horse to some mesquite and started climbing. It was talus slope, at first, treacherous going in his high-heeled boots. He squirmed over the lip at the top, debris rolling down to make a small roar in the gorge.

He rose to his feet on a narrow ledge that shelved upward, switching back on itself, becoming a defile between outcropping rocks. It was a steep, laborious going. He had to stop for a breath more than once.

In one of those pauses he felt his head jerk up in reaction. Had there been motion above him?

He could see nothing.

He began moving upward, for the first time realizing the full implications of what he might meet up there. Jahzini might start shooting without taking time to recognize him.

Banner's eyes began to ache with the strain of trying to find something on the twilit rim of rocks. There was no movement above him. No sound. Nothing.

The ledge widened, fanned out through a studding of rocks that hung on the lip of the plateau. His breathing was loud and gusty. He neared the top of the cliff, his eye-level lifted above the tops of the last rocks. He stopped.

"*Belinkana?*"

A sly, nasal, questioning tone to it. *American?* A cunning tone, matching the cunning light in Jahzini's eyes, in his blandly smiling face. He sat there like a paunchy, leering Buddha, in the rocks, with the *tusjeh* beside him, uncorked. The Remington six-shooter in his lap was pointed at Banner.

"Jahzini—"

The gun snapped up, stopping Banner short. Jahzini held it in both hands. Banner could see no recognition in the drink-glazed eyes.

"*Belinkana?*"

High and nasal. *American?* Rolling it around the tongue. Savoring it.

Banner sought swiftly for the right words to say, now, trying to avoid the verb forms that could put so many different, wrong meanings onto it.

"Jahzini—Hackett did this on purpose—Big Red is in the posse—they know you will fight. They want you dead, don't you understand, they want you dead—"

"Dead!"

The gun jerked, as Jahzini said it. His whole body seemed to lift up, a wild light in his eyes. Then, the small click.

Jahzini was staring at Banner over a cocked gun. Banner felt the sweat break out on his palms.

He knew he had to speak again. There was so little time left. He sought desperately for the right thing to say.

"Jahzini, you remember me. You remember Tsi Tsosi."

"Tsi Tsosi?"

"Yes. Yellow Hair. And Keet Seel. Remember the lion at Keet Seel? Who was it saved your life? You cut our palms. We mingled blood. We were brothers. Look at your hand—"

Suspiciously, the Indian let that pass through his mind. It seemed to take forever. Then he let go of the gun with his right hand, stared bleary-eyed at the palm. The old scar was faint and white against the dirty brown skin. Slowly the Navaho's eyes raised. Just as slowly, Banner held his hand out, palm up. It bore a faint white scar too. Jahzini squinted.

The gun seemed to lower a little. The effort of remembering etched the million wrinkles deeper into Jahzini's nut-brown face. The drunken cunning faded from his eyes.

"Tsi Tsosi?" he said wonderingly. Then he grinned, tentatively, and his voice was touched by all the chuckling warmth with which he had imbued the name when he had first called Banner Yellow Hair. "Tsi Tsosi—"

Banner knew a glowing triumph, and started to move toward the old man. Then he stopped. Jahzini's head had lifted sharply. The wild look was back in his eyes. They were staring beyond Banner.

And the young man could hear it now too. Down in the canyon. A hollow rustling. A far-off clatter of hoofs across shale in the canyon bottom. Then there was a shout from below.

"Jahzini, is that you?"

It was Drake's voice, coming from the depths of the gorge, echoing and re-echoing till a hundred men seemed to be shouting. It filled Banner with the impulse to turn. But the expression on Jahzini's face checked him. The Indian's features looked shrunken with rage. The gun was pointed at Banner's chest, and the wrinkled thumb was clamped hard over the cocked hammer.

"Jahzini," Banner said. "I didn't bring them here. You've got to believe me. I didn't betray you—"

"All right, you old fool," Drake called out loudly. "We're coming up. Cut loose just once and we'll shoot you off that cliff."

The creak of leather, from below. The first rustle of climbing men, from below. The irony of it filled the young lawyer bitterly. He was sky-lighted on the rim, and the men down there thought he was Jahzini.

The gun was trembling in the old Indian's hand. Banner stared across its black bore, into those yellow-tinged eyes.

Then somebody started the first landslide. He must have kicked a sizeable rock loose, for it made a startling crash of sound in the canyon.

"*Belinkana—*" Jahzini jumped to his feet, shouting it, and fired down into the canyon.

In sheer reflex, Banner threw himself at the man, knocking him backward. A dozen guns must have gone off below in the following instant. A hail of bullets took vicious bites out of the rocks where Banner had stood the moment before. If Jahzini had been on his feet he would have been cut to pieces.

Jahzini struggled to free himself from beneath Banner. But the young lawyer caught at the gun, twisted it from his grasp. The old man clawed him like a cat. Banner hit him across the side of the head with the barrel of the gun. Jahzini went slack beneath him.

The guns were still racketing from below, filling the gorge with a gigantic roar. A ricochet screamed like a woman in pain. Deafened by the din, Banner crouched low over Jahzini.

Without raising up, he tried to drag the old man farther back from the edge. There was furtive movement from among the rocks. Banner jerked the gun up. Cristina crawled into view. Banner let his pent breath out.

"I had to hit him," he said.

"I know." She came closer, shouting in the din. "We cannot go back to my horse. Those Papago trackers must have known about this foot trail. They led Arles and another man around to that end of it. I saw them reach my horse as I got to the top of the mesa. They will be coming up after me."

"Is there another way down from here?"

"A mile to the west. It is dangerous, but we might make it."

"And from there, how far to the nearest place we could get horses?"

"Ten or twelve miles to Kitteridge's place. We could lose our tracks in the Corn River."

They pulled Jahzini back into the brush. He crouched on his hands and knees, shaking his head. Finally he looked up at Banner. The blow seemed to have sobered him somewhat.

"*Bahagi,*" he groaned. "I have committed a great offense."

"You did nothing of the sort," Banner told him. "You fired past me, down into the canyon. I should have known you couldn't ever get drunk enough to shoot me."

"I thought you were an evil *belinkana.* I thought you were Nayenezrani himself come to strike me down with all four of his lightnings."

"We've got to make a run for it, Old Black Ears. Can you stand?"

"Stand? I can fly. The wind cannot keep up with me." He tried to rise, swayed, would have fallen if they hadn't caught him. He shook them off. "Let us go," he said. "Cry out when you grow tired and I will carry you on my back."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Lonely Man

SOMEHOW they made it down the treacherous, forgotten trail on the west end of the mesa. They knew it would be hard for the Papagos to track them at night, and in that lay their hope. They left a false trail leading north and then gained the Corn River and turned south in its shallows. For the first few miles the old man showed a surprising stamina, slopping through the muddy water. As Banner moved beside him, Jahzini chuckled roguishly and gave him a poke in the ribs.

"I should escape jail more often, if that is what it takes to see my white son again. I have missed those nights in the *hogan*. With Cristina gone away to school, there was no one I could tell the myths to."

"Those nights will come again. You must help them come. You must tell us what happened."

The old man nodded. "I was all mixed up. They showed me Wright's saddlebags and said they had found them in my *hogan* and said I killed him. I was drunk when they found me and I couldn't remember anything anyway, and I thought maybe I did kill him and couldn't remember it."

"But you didn't."

"No. Now I do not think I did. I was taking wool to town by wagon that day when I heard the shot in Yellow Gap. When I came upon Wright he was dead. It gave me great fear. I had fought with Wright over the land. His death would make great trouble for my people. I went to the hogan of my cousin."

"And got drunk."

"Sometimes just running is not enough."

"Never mind, Old Black Ears. You are with your people now."

"That is good. It gives me strength. If you grow tired we can sing *hozhoni* songs. They will make us holy and give us wings to our feet."

So they sang *hozhoni* songs as they ran, because they knew it would help the old man. They sang the Lightning Song and Pounding Boy's Song and the War God's Song and all the old songs that Jahzini's people had been singing for hundreds of years when they set out upon a journey or started off to war.

But finally the old man began stumbling and they had to slow down to a walk and even the songs were too much effort. Banner did not know what time of night it was that they reached the forks in the river and left the shallows and made their way into the broken country west of Chimney Buttes. Then the old man stumbled and fell to his hands and knees in the sand, his breathing shallow with exhaustion. When they helped him up, he shook his head.

"It is a bad thing to have a father who will lie to you. I really could not carry you on my back if you got tired."

Banner slapped him affectionately on the back. "You can't fool me. I am on to your jokes. You pretended to be tired that time when we were racing for the blankets and I slowed down because I thought I had beaten you and you passed me up before I knew what had happened."

A feeble roguishness lit the oblique glance Jahzini sent him. "Ai," he said, giving Banner a sly poke in the ribs.

"I did beat you that time, didn't I? You make me young again, bringing back the old days. Very well, let us run some more."

"And sing some more," Cristina said. "Sing us the Clown Song, like you used to."

"I cannot thump my belly to make a drum any more. It seems to hurt me or something."

"I will thump my belly," Banner said. "You sing."

So they sang another song, moving across the broken land in that unremitting Indian dog-trot, with Banner thumping his belly and the old man chanting the Clown Song in a husky, wavering voice. It helped for a while. Then the old man began faltering, and they had to slow down to a walk, and finally he fell again, and they had to stop and rest. Banner lost count of the times they ran, the times they rested. He thought the night would never end.

But the dawn came at last, revealing Chimney Buttes on the horizon. And when the sun rose, they were in sight of Kitteridge's house, backed up against the wall of a mesa.

Banner and Cristina were half-carrying Jahzini now, each holding him up by an arm. He was stupefied with exhaustion.

"Just cry out if you cannot go on," he mumbled. "I will carry you on my back—"

Banner saw the hammerheaded roan and half a dozen other horses in the corral. Kitteridge opened the door before they reached it.

His gaunt frame seemed to stiffen as he saw them. His eyes widened with his first surprise, then squinted almost shut, and he watched their approach with a suspicious withdrawal on his face.

"Let us get Jahzini inside," Banner panted. "I think he's passed out."

"I ain't harboring no murderer."

"He's not a murderer, damn you. Let us in. You'd help a dog if he was in this shape."

Reluctantly, Kitteridge moved out of the way, and they staggered into the room, carrying Jahzini to a chair. When they got him into it, Cristina had to hold the old man to keep him from falling. Kitteridge still stood at the door. Banner pulled the table across in front of Jahzini so he could lean forward without falling. When Cristina let him go he dropped his head into his arms. She took the other chair, leaning heavily against the table, her eyes blank with exhaustion. Banner let a long gust of air run out of him, his eyes glazed with weariness.

"Now," he said. "We'll need three horses."

"The hell you will. I told you—"

"I'm trying to get Jahzini back to Mexican Hat," Banner said. "They set this up so Jahzini could escape. They wanted to kill him before this case came to trial."

"Is that so?" Kitteridge said cynically. "Who set it up?"

"I haven't got time to explain that, Kitteridge. But Jahzini's innocent. You've got to help me save his life. There's a posse on our trail now and they'll kill him if they get him."

"I ain't helping no murderer."

"He isn't a murderer, damn you—" Banner broke off, staring in frustrated anger at the cynicism in the man's long face. Kitteridge slouched across the room to the spindled Mexican cupboard. From this he took a coffeepot, shook coffee into it from a sack.

"Shouldn't of let you spoil my breakfast," he said. "If you want to get away

from that posse bad enough to walk all this distance for my horses, you sure as hell won't let them catch you here, whether you get the horses or not. *Ipso facto*, counselor?"

Banner's voice was pinched with restraint. "You won't give us the horses?"

Kitteridge set the pot on the stove. "I told you."

The restraint left Banner, his words exploded in a gust of anger as he wheeled toward the back door. "Then we're taking them!"

Kitteridge did not seem to move fast. He straightened and stepped toward the front. Cristina jumped from her chair, trying to block him. But somehow he was at the door before she reached him.

"No you ain't," he said.

At the rear door Banner half-turned, to see the man standing by a heap of rigging. He had pulled a Winchester from its boot. It was crooked in one elbow, pointed toward the lawyer.

"There ain't so much as a rope out in them corrals," Kitteridge said. "You'd have to come back here anyway. The halters are in this pile."

Cristina had stopped, halfway to the man. Now the look of her face altered subtly. She began to walk toward Kitteridge. He did not even shift the gun.

"I never shot a lady," he said. "But I'll sure as hell swipe the barrel of this gun across your head if you come any nearer."

"Don't do it, Cristina," Banner's voice was sharp. "He means what he says."

Cristina stopped. A long breath left her. It made a hissing sound in the room. Banner stared at Kitteridge.

"I always thought they misjudged you in town, Kitteridge. I'm beginning to believe they didn't."

"I mind my business. I expect other people to do the same."

"Why?" Banner asked thinly. "Are you running from something too? You've been here three years and haven't made a friend. There's a lot of people who think you're on the dodge. What are you Kitteridge? A thief? A murderer?"

A whipped look crossed Kitteridge's face, and he started to lean forward. Then he checked himself.

"You're not in the courtroom now, counselor," he said.

Banner hardly heard him. He was looking at the gear beside Kitteridge. The yellow color on the saddle had been visible all the time, but his anger had blinded him to its significance. It came through at last. A yellow stain on the bottom of a stirrup. Clay. The bright yellow clay a man would pick up at Yellow Gap.

"That's a little saddle," Banner said. "Was it the bay's?"

Kitteridge revealed his surprise. "What bay's?"

"The bay you gave to Jeremiah Mills."

Kitteridge's grin held no humor. "Yes, counselor?"

Banner felt his hands closing into fists. "That tree looks too small to fit any of the horses you've got here."

"The bay was a little horse. I'll get me another little horse."

"Then you haven't used that saddle since you rode the bay?"

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"A lot. Did you go through Yellow Gap the last time you rode the bay?"

The coffee started to boil. Its hissing was the only sound in the room. Kitteridge was studying Banner.

"Why should I want to kill Wallace Wright?"

"I'm not implying you killed Wright," Banner said hotly. "There was an eyewitness to the killing. We have every reason to believe he saw it from the rim of the gap. He came from up here and he rode a bay horse."

Cristina was watching the man intently. The hiss of boiling water became a gurgle. At last he spoke.

"All of Mills' saddles were too small for that bay. He used this one for quite a while after I gave him the horse."

"Mills said you gave him the horse after the killing."

"He's a liar."

"You're saying you didn't see the killing?"

"A man that minds his own chores don't go around poking his nose into things like that."

"Damn you, Kitteridge, it isn't a matter of poking your nose in people's business. You'd be saving a man's life. If you didn't talk, it would be the same as murdering Jahzini—"

"Save your howling for the jury, counselor," Kitteridge said. "I didn't see any killing. I didn't see nothing."

Banner felt his whole body grow rigid in frustrated anger. He began to pace across the room.

"Isn't there anything that can touch you? They're set to kill this old man, shooting, or hanging, or however else they can do it. The man who saw that murder is the only one who can save him—"

"Looks like you're gettin' impatient," Kitteridge said. "It's true you ain't got much time left. That posse's had a lot of daylight to track you now. They might be riding up outside right now."

Banner checked his angry pacing. He knew the man was right. The trick of hiding their tracks in the river wouldn't fool the Papagos for long.

The lid of the coffeepot began to clatter and dance, and Kitteridge glanced at Cristina. "Move it off, honey. It's fixin' to boil over."

The girl rose, going toward the oven. She picked up a dirty rag to use as a pot-holder and bent over the coffee. It was then that she glanced at Banner. He looked at Kitteridge. Then he took a lunging step toward the man.

"Damn you, Kitter—"

"Stay there," the man snapped, jerking his rifle up.

For that moment it took his attention completely away from Cristina. She picked up the coffeepot and threw it.

The man reacted instantly, turning toward her motion. But he was too late. The top fell off as the pot struck him. The boiling water cascaded over his head.

His shout of pain filled the room. He dropped the rifle and staggered backward, hands clapped to his scalded face. Banner jumped to the Winchester, scooping it up. Kitteridge stood rigidly against the wall, hands spread tightly over his face. His breathing was a sobbing sound in the room. Banner gave the rifle to Cristina and turned to get the can of beef tallow on a shelf.

"Stay away from me," Kitteridge said.

"Don't be a fool," Banner told him. "You'll be scarred for good unless you get some of this on your face."

He had to pull the man's hands down. Kitteridge's eyes were squinted shut, his face intensely contorted. Banner put the grease on his cheeks in great gobs and rubbed it in gently.

Cristina held the Winchester on the man, mouth pinched and tight.

"I am sorry," she said. "You forced us—"

"If you was a man I'd kill you," Kitteridge said. "I'd kill you right now."

"It was my father. You made me do it. I could not let them kill him. You must understand."

Kitteridge leaned back against the wall, drawing a thin, whistling breath between his teeth. "All right. So you couldn't let them kill him."

"You do understand, you don't hate me?"

"Hate you?" The man opened his eyes to look at her. They were watering and twitching with the pain of the burn. "No, honey," he said finally. "I guess I don't hate you."

Banner looked at him in surprise. He turned to put the can of grease on the table and took the rifle from the girl.

"I'd better hold him here while you saddle up, Cristina."

"That ain't necessary," Kitteridge said. "If you want the horses that bad, you got 'em."

"You disappoint me," Banner said. "I thought you were all vinegar."

Kitteridge took a weary breath. "Nobody's all anything, counselor. Just get out of here before that posse shows."

"You'd better get a doctor as soon as you can."

"I don't need a doctor." The man turned to pace across the room. He stopped by the fireplace, staring blankly at the wall. His voice lowered. "I don't need nobody."

Banner stared at his back, with a new insight into the man. "I think that's where you're wrong, Kitteridge," he said. "I think you've needed somebody for a long time."

Chapter Twelve

Judge Prentice Signs an Order

EVENING had come before they got back to Mexican Hat. They came in from the south, across the railroad tracks, through the Mexican district. Tilfego was not home, but they left their jaded horses in his corral. They went up the alley between Aztec and Central to Judge Prentice's house. But the place was unlit. The only other chance they had was that the judge was working late in his chambers at the courthouse.

It was a tense journey to the square, and into the gaunt old building, but they were not stopped. Light showed under the judge's door. Banner knocked softly. Prentice's voice sounded muffled, asking them to enter. His swivel chair shrieked, as he leaned back in utter surprise at Jahzini's appearance. Banner towered behind Jahzini in the doorway, his eyes red-rimmed and feverish, deep lines of weariness about his mouth.

"He came back of his own accord, Judge. You've got to believe that. I brought him to you because you're the only one I can trust now."

The chair groaned more softly, as Prentice leaned forward again, putting his hands on the desk, littered with the manila-backed briefs of his cases. Then he rose abruptly, coming around the desk.

"Sit down," he said. "You look all beaten out." He went to the scarred highboy by the window and got a bottle of brandy and three glasses from one of the cupboards. While he poured the drinks and handed them around,

Banner helped Jahzini into a chair. The old man was stupid with exhaustion and sat huddled over, gazing blankly at the floor. Banner spoke swiftly.

"The posse can't be far behind us. I want your word on something before they come. If you won't give it I'm taking Jahzini right back out, Judge."

Prentice smiled ruefully. "Don't put me on the spot, Lee."

"I only want your word you'll put Jahzini on the first train out of Mexican Hat. Send him to the Territorial Penitentiary at Yuma till the date of his trial."

Prentice moved to the window and stared out, his hands locked behind him.

"I know there's a lot of feeling against him. There's even been talk of lynching. But I doubt if it will come to that—"

"You know what I'm talking about."

The judge was silent for a long moment. Then he took a reluctant breath. "All right. Talk has also been going around that you think Hackett had Wright killed. I asked your uncle about it. He said that was your theory."

"It's more than a theory," Banner said. "I turned two items of evidence over to the court which might have proven Jahzini's innocence. Doesn't it strike you strange that they were destroyed in that explosion, while all the evidence against him was saved?"

"I've been thinking of that—"

"Thinking of it!"

Prentice turned toward him. "Take it easy, Lee. I know you're perfectly sincere in what you're doing. But have you stopped to think what this has done to Henry? Not only his personal feelings for you, but his position—"

"Have you stopped to think what it's done to Jahzini?"

Prentice flushed, started to speak, checked himself with effort. Then the thud of hoofbeats came from the street, the faraway shout of a man.

"They're here," Prentice said.

"Judge, please—"

The man frowned at him. The heavy echo of boots ran down the outer hallway. Cristina came up out of her chair, hands clenched at her side. There was the rumble of voices outside, the door shook to a knock. Prentice glanced apprehensively at Jahzini, then said:

"Come in."

Sheriff Drake was the first to enter, with Clay Hackett and Big Red and Blackstrap Kelly pushing in behind. Drake halted his gross bulk a couple of paces inside the room, staring at Jahzini.

"How do you like that?" he said with weary disgust. "Chase all around the country and find them right back where we started." He seemed to settle against the floor, emitting a long, wheezing breath. "We tracked you to Kitteridge's. He said you was coming back here. I wouldn't believe him."

Anger made Hackett's prominent cheekbones stand out whitely. "That was you up on the cliff?" he asked Banner.

The lawyer ignored him, speaking to Drake. "Jahzini came back of his own accord."

"After trying to ambush us," Hackett said.

"He was drunk. He didn't know what he was doing."

"Well, we know what we're doing," Hackett said. "Charlie, slap those cuffs on him. He won't get away again."

Drake started to move. Banner took one long step that put himself between Jahzini and the sheriff.

"Don't get in the way again, Lee," Hackett said.

Banner spoke to Prentice without moving his eyes from Drake. "Judge?"

Prentice had been watching Hackett closely. "How do you happen to be in the posse?" he asked.

"I wasn't," Hackett said. "There was a card game at Blackstrap's."

"I understand you were represented, anyway. Good of you to spare Big Red, right at roundup time."

"And Arles," Banner said.

Hackett turned sharply toward Banner, a biting anger filling his eyes. But he did not speak. As if feeling Prentice's gaze on him, Hackett closed his mouth and wheeled slowly back till he was looking at Prentice again, his gaunt features wooden and enigmatic.

"So it's bad to join a posse now," he said. His voice was silk-soft. "Maybe you'd rather chase your murderers next time without one."

Drake shifted uncomfortably. "Now, Clay—"

"We didn't mean to criticize your public spirit, Mr. Hackett," Prentice said. He studied Hackett quizzically for another moment. "The feeling's bad enough in this town. After this little escapade it might get dangerous. I think we'd better send Jahzini to Yuma for safekeeping till the trial."

"And give him another chance to escape?" Blackstrap Kelly said.

"Not many men have escaped Yuma," Prentice answered dryly. "I'll sign the order. You can wire Yuma for confirmation tonight, Charlie. I think there's a train at ten thirty-eight tomorrow morning. You can send a couple of your deputies to guard him."

As the pen began to scratch, Hackett turned to look at Banner. For a moment, he let the anger show in his eyes again, naked and ugly. Then, without a word, he wheeled to the door. Big Red followed Hackett out. Prentice raised a brief glance to Banner. Then he lowered his head and began to write again.

Cristina was bent over her father, explaining to him in Navaho what had happened. He began to nod, frowning. When she was finished, he held up an arm, and Cristina caught it, helping him to stand. Then he shuffled over to Banner, putting his sinewy old hands on his shoulders. He was smiling, and his eyes were suspiciously wet.

"*Shiye*," he said, patting Banner gently with both hands. "My son."

Chapter Thirteen

Who Is Kitteridge?

NEXT morning, Banner boarded the train with Jahzini and two of Drake's deputies. Hackett had little power outside Navaho County, and Banner felt sure the man could not touch Jahzini beyond Flagstaff. So he rode that far, checking each passenger who got on, making sure that none of the cars held anyone remotely connected with Hackett. Banner said good-by to the Indian at Flagstaff, returning to Mexican Hat on the next train.

And again he set out on the process of elimination. It took him two days to finish questioning the people of Mexican Hat. No new suspects arose. Mills and Kitteridge were the only white men from the north country that had been seen in Mexican Hat during the day of the murder.

After finishing in town, Banner rode out to the trading-post. Beside meaning to question Calico Adams, he had half-hoped to see Julia. But it was after three o'clock, and school had already closed, and Calico said Julia had already gone on her usual afternoon ride. The trader told the lawyer there had been no stranger on the Reservation who might have come south through Yellow Gap during June. And though Adakhai had not been at the trading-post since April, several Indians had seen him hunting in the country west of Yellow Gap on the week before the murder.

After leaving Calico, Banner rode north to begin his routine check of the remaining whites between the railroad tracks and the reservation. He reached Caleb Elder's about five.

The man was a big, taciturn cattle operator who had been Banner's rival for Julia two years ago. That old antagonism, and the trouble Elder had been having with the Indians, filled him with a hostility he did not try to veil.

But Banner told him that the trial would probably be in September, and that unless he cleared himself of any suspected connection with the murder, he could be subpoenaed to testify, and would undoubtedly lose a lot of time from fall roundup. This made him admit that he had been driving cattle across the reservation to St. Michaels during the week of the murder. He gave as witnesses Joe Garry and Breed, whom he had met holding some Hackett cattle on the Rio Puerco. Banner would not accept them, and Elder included the father at St. Michaels, to whom he had delivered the cattle on the day of the murder. It completely obviated any chance of Elder being at Yellow Gap, seventy miles away, on the same day.

However, the fact that the two Hackett riders were holding Broken Bit cattle deep in reservation land was direct evidence that Hackett was violating the treaty, and Banner knew it would be a strong item of subsidiary evidence for the defense. So he prepared a statement, including the names of Joe Garry and Breed as witnesses to Elder's claim, which Elder signed.

The trail back to the Ganado Road cut across a vast, broken country, and Banner free-bitted his horse through the soft dusk. He wound into a cut, red with crumbled sandstone, puckered with the mounds made by kangaroo rats. He emerged from the mouth of the cut and crossed a sandy flat to Parker's Sink, the only water hole between Elder's and the railroad.

Two riders were already watering their animals at the sink. One of them was Julia Wright, a handsome figure in her riding-habit of dark green suede, a pork-pie hat tilted saucily on high-piled hair. The other one, sitting slackly on a hammerheaded roan, was Victor Kitteridge.

There was a long space of awkward silence. Then Kitteridge's saddle groaned as he shifted his weight.

"Seems like everybody's out riding tonight."

"Seems like," Banner said, nodding a sober greeting to Julia. "Did you get your three horses back, Kitteridge?"

"Your Indian boy brought 'em back all right."

"How's the face?"

"No uglier'n usual."

"It didn't seem to leave any scars."

"Take more'n that."

"You don't seem mad."

"Bygones."

"Then maybe you'll tell me about the bay, now."

"No."

"When they hang Jahzini, will you come to see it?"

Julia stiffened in the saddle, her face going white. Kitteridge showed no reaction.

"I'll be dragging," he said.

He gathered up his reins, nodded to Julia, heeled his horse around, rode out through the trees. Banner was watching the small changes of expression pass through Julia's face.

"Did you know him, back in Denver?"

She flushed. "I told you I didn't. I stopped here to water my horse. He was coming back from Ganado."

"A man saw your father murdered, Julia. I've narrowed it down to three possibilities. Kitteridge is one. If you know him, I need your help the worst way."

"Oh, stop it," she said bitterly. "Do you have to go on hurting everybody—"

"You know I don't mean to hurt you."

"Then why don't you stop? It's not only me. Can't you see what you're doing to Henry? It used to be I couldn't go into town without seeing your uncle out there on the corner, talking with some friends. Now he's never there. Do you know why? He's up in his office. He's hiding, Lee—"

"Julia—"

"He's the laughingstock of the town. You've made a circus of this thing. Can anybody take Henry seriously with his own son turning on him like that? Everybody's come to look on you as practically his son."

"I can't help it. Do you think I'd turn on Henry if there was any other way? Don't you think it's tearing my insides out to see him cross the street to avoid me?"

She turned her head sharply aside, squeezing her eyes shut. "Oh, Lee, why does it have to be this way? I'm so mixed up. I still want to believe Jahzini killed Dad, I want to hate him for it—"

"But you can't," he said. "Admit it."

"All right—" she shook her head savagely. "I admit it, I admit it."

She put her hands over her face, her shoulders began to tremble with her sobs. He stepped over to her horse.

"Julia," he said softly, persuasively. "Julia."

She looked down at him, her throat working.

"You would have come down to me before, if you'd really relented," he said.

"I've admitted I couldn't just let Jahzini hang, if there was any chance of his innocence. What more can you ask?"

"Things have changed," he said.

Her throat stopped working. "I suppose they have."

"Hackett?"

"Don't be a fool."

"You've seen a lot of him lately."

"It isn't Hackett. Can't you leave it at that?"

He stared up at her, searching her face. "Then you'll help me with Jahzini," he said. "You'll tell me about Kitteridge."

"Lee, I don't see what possible connection—"

He reached up to catch her hand. "I've checked at the post office. Ed tells me that in the three years Kitter-

idge has been here he's gotten one letter, from Denver. If you knew Kitteridge up there you've got to tell me, Julia. I can't seem to reach him. He knows that if he saw the murder he could save Jahzini's life by testifying. But he won't admit anything."

"Maybe he actually didn't see the killing."

"I can't cross him off till I'm absolutely sure. If he did see it, Julia, what's keeping him from admitting it? He must have some powerful reason. Is it something in his past?"

She gave that savage shake of her head again. "If it was, could you ask me to betray him?"

He tightened his grip on her hand. "If you don't tell me, I'll have to wire the District Attorney in Denver. I'll have to give him a description of Kitteridge, the date of Kitteridge's arrival here. I'll ask him if anyone is wanted in Colorado who would fit the description."

Her voice was barely a whisper. "You wouldn't."

"I'm trying to save a man's life, Julia."

She looked away, biting her lip. She took a deep breath, and finally spoke.

"I did know Kitteridge up in Denver." Her words were flat and toneless. "He was Victor Morrow then. You probably remember the case."

"The Morrow-Ware Land and Cattle Company." Banner's eyes were wide with surprise. "About five years ago, wasn't it? One of the biggest swindles in the Southwest. As I remember, the chief bookkeeper was the only one they caught. Sheffield, or something."

"Shefford," she said. "His testimony led to Victor Morrow's indictment. Victor escaped before they could jail him, came down here, changed his name to Kitteridge. But he didn't have anything to do with the swindle. It was Ware who engineered the whole thing, with the bookkeeper's help."

"But the grand jury didn't even indict Ware, he got off with a clean slate—"

"Of course he did. He framed Victor. As general field manager for the company, Victor only got into the office twice a month. He had no idea how Ware was pyramiding the stocks or appropriating the company funds. They made him the goat. Shefford falsified the books to make Victor seem responsible. But something must have slipped, and Shefford was caught."

"Then why didn't Shefford expose Ware and get a chunk of his term knocked off for turning state's evidence?"

She shook her head. "Shefford was playing for bigger stakes. Victor did have access to the books, but they probably let him see only innocent figures. As he remembers it, though, even those figures didn't turn up at the trial. The only thing we could figure out was that Shefford had kept two sets of books. The falsified ones, which made Victor seem guilty, and which turned up at the trial, and the real ones, which nobody ever saw."

"Why would Shefford do that?"

"Because the real ones would prove Ware's guilt," she said. "Shefford was keeping them as sort of insurance against Ware. Ware must have made a couple of hundred thousand on that swindle. He'd certainly pay to keep Shefford from turning the real books in."

"It sounds logical," Banner muttered. "But if those real books would prove Ware's guilt, they might prove Morrow's—Kitteridge's innocence."

"Don't you think I've told Victor that a million times?" she said bitterly. "I spent weeks talking with Shefford, trying to get him to admit the truth, to tell us where the real books were. It was no use. But I'm convinced I'm right."

"And you really think there's a chance Kitteridge could prove his innocence?"

"I know he could, Lee. It would just take someone who knew how to work, someone with more connections than I had. Ware disappeared shortly after the trial. A couple of years later we got word that he was separated from his wife, she was living somewhere in Kansas. I even tried to follow that down. I ran out of money—"

She trailed off, close to tears again. She was stooped in the saddle, her head hanging, all the spirit drained from her.

"I always wondered what lay between us," he said.

She looked down at him, frowning intensely. Then she shook her head. "No, Lee. You're wrong. I knew Victor had come down here and changed his name to Kitteridge. When Dad got a chance to transfer to the Navaho Agency, I asked him to do it. Maybe I still hoped to help Kitteridge clear himself, maybe I had some fool notion that we could go on. I was wrong both ways. He's so changed, Lee, so bitter, not the man I knew in Denver at all. It took me a year down here to finally admit it to myself."

"And that was where I came in?"

She nodded slowly. "About that time." She glanced at him quickly, apprehensively. "Don't think I was using you merely to forget Kitteridge. What you and I had would have happened whether I'd known Victor or not. It was good, Lee. Maybe I still wasn't completely over Kitteridge. Maybe that's what you felt between us. But it isn't between us now, Lee. Whatever I had with Kitteridge up in Denver is over."

He studied her face somberly, and his voice was dark and wondering. "Is it, Julia?" he asked.

Chapter Fourteen

Tilfego Volunteers

ALL the way back to Mexican Hat a dozen different thoughts gnawed at him, a dozen different emotions. He didn't know yet whether he believed Julia when she said she and Kitteridge were through. He didn't think she knew herself. He didn't even know what he felt for Julia now.

In this frustrated confusion he reached Mexican Hat. The bright hardness of burning sun was gone from the streets. The buildings etched a broken silhouette of rooftops and false fronts against a moonlit sky. Kerosene torches flared from a score of wooden overhangs, dappling the rutted street with miniature lakes of yellow light.

He saw Tilfego's buckskin yawning at the hitchrack before Kelly's, and swung his own animal into a slot between two horses.

He got off and stepped up to the sidewalk. Over the tops of the batwing doors he could see a thin evening crowd lined up at the Brunswicke bar, a few scattered diners at the tables. Tilfego sat near the wall, a plate of tortillas before him. As Celestina maneuvered her jiggling bulk past him

with a tray, he reached out to pinch her on the hip.

Banner saw his uncle, then, sitting at a corner table. He started to push through the doors, but something about the man's posture checked him. The white-haired lawyer sat stiffly in his chair, facing the wall. His meal was only half-finished, but he was not eating. One of his hands was gripping the edge of the table so tightly that the tendons stood out in bluish ridges. It struck Banner how many of the men at the bar were looking at Dodge. There was derision in their drink-flushed faces, and a couple of them were grinning broadly.

The two Hackett riders Elder had seen on the reservation stood at the far end of the bar. Joe Garry was a short, broad-girthed man. Breed was taller, with a slouching, stoop-shouldered way of standing.

"Hey, Henry," Joe Garry called. His voice was slurred with drink. "Give me the latest. They tell me you don't have enough evidence to convict Jahzini. You just sent Banner out to raise all this ruckus so you wouldn't have to prosecute."

A general laugh went up from the men at the bar. Banner saw the artery in Dodge's temple throbbing, saw the deep red flush of his face. But his back was to Garry, and he did not turn to answer the Hackett rider.

"Leave the old man alone," Tilfego said. "His supper you are spoiling."

"We're just asking him the latest," Garry laughed.

"Yeah," Breed said. "I hear the Indians are going to run one of their men for District Attorney. If they can murder the agent and get away with it they figure they can do anything."

Banner saw Dodge's body begin to tremble faintly. Hot with anger, the young man pushed through the batwings, but the scrape of Dodge's chair checked him once more. The old man had pushed it back, and was rising. He started to walk stiffly toward the door. Then he saw Banner.

He stopped, eyes wide with surprise. A corner of his mouth twitched. Banner moved swiftly between a pair of empty tables.

"I've got to see you, Henry."

The flush of anger remained in Dodge's face, but a strange, pleading look filled his eyes, like that of a man clutching at his last straw. "You mean you're ready to admit you're wrong about Jahzini?"

"No, but we can't go on like th—"

"Then we have nothing to talk about."

Dodge's face was so set it looked frozen, and he started to go around Banner. The young man tried to grab his arm.

"Henry—"

Dodge jerked free. It unbalanced him and he stumbled into a chair, almost upsetting it. Half a dozen of the men at the bar began to laugh, and Joe Garry shouted again.

"Why not take the buggy whip to him, Henry, like you used to?"

One hand on the table, Dodge wheeled toward them. He made a strangled sound of rage. Sending a last, torn look at Banner, he wheeled and stamped out.

"Looked like the old mossyhorn was goin' to bust a gut," Garry laughed. "You oughtta have more respect for your uncle, Lee. You're both shysters under the skin."

It brought laughter from the whole line at the bar. Banner spun toward Garry, but he felt a hand on his arm,

and Tilfego's bland voice came through his anger.

"Toss the slack out, Lee. Let them ride you and every man in town you have to fight."

Banner stood rigidly, staring at the crowd, trying to gain control of himself. He shook his head helplessly, allowing Tilfego to guide him to an empty space near the front end of the bar. Joe Garry put down a silver dollar for his drinks and turned toward the front door, followed by Breed.

Blackstrap Kelly stumped along on the other side of the bar till he was in front of them. He put his hairy hands flat on the mahogany, staring unwinkingly into Banner's face.

"What you like?" Tilfego asked.

"How about some of that Old Kentucky?" Banner asked.

"All out of it," Kelly told them.

"Make it beer then."

"All out of that too."

Banner took his foot off the worn rail, straightening up. "What have you got?"

"Nothin'."

"You make it pretty clear, Blackstrap."

"It hurts my business to have you in here. But I wouldn't serve no Injun-lover anyhow. It's you oughtta be strung up, after letting him escape like that."

"He didn't escape. They took him to Yuma—"

"I'll believe that when Charlie Drake's deputies get back."

Joe Garry stopped before passing Banner. "What's this about the deputies? I hear Jahzini tried to escape at Flagstaff and they had to shoot him down."

Banner wheeled to him. "Don't be a fool. I rode as far as Flagstaff with—"

"Don't take it so hard, Lee." Garry's greasy jowls were flushed with drink. "You're the one to crow now. You're collecting so much evidence there won't be any left for old Henry."

Tilfego grabbed Banner's rigid arm. "Cut it out, Garry," he said.

"What the hell," Garry chuckled. "Lee knows all the latest news. Don't he, Breed?"

"Tha's what they tell me," Breed said.

"Give me the latest, Lee. They say you was building up such a case for Jahzini that Henry knew he couldn't win if it reached court. He blew that safe open hisself so the old Indian could escape—"

Banner hit Garry. It smashed the man backward into Breed and then he twisted off and fell to the floor. Breed had been thrown back into the bar. He recovered with a violent lunge, slapping for his gun.

"Stop it," Blackstrap said.

Breed's whole violent movement halted with his hand on his gun. Slowly, he turned to Blackstrap Kelly. The saloonkeeper had a sawed-off shotgun resting on the bar.

"I don't want no killing in my place," he said. "Get out of here. All of you."

Garry got to his feet. He stood before Banner, swaying faintly, his eyes muddy with a seething anger. Then he turned around and pushed his way through the batwings. Breed followed, his hand still on his gun. Banner waited till he saw them both cross the sidewalk and drop off to their horses. Then he went out through the doors with Tilfego.

The kerosene torches on the edge of the overhang splashed their smoky yellow light across Garry, standing between two animals at the rack. He

seemed to be tightening the cinch on his paint. But the light caught the whites of his eyes, turned obliquely toward the sidewalk.

"Can you see me as well as I can see you?" Tilfego asked, softly.

Garry went on tugging at his latigo, without answering. But he was plainly visible, in the torchlight, while Banner and Tilfego stood in the black shadows beneath the overhang. Garry must have realized the advantage that gave them, because he finally tossed his reins over the paint's head and swung aboard. He held the fiddling horse, waiting for Breed to mount.

"You made a mistake, Banner. Twenty men ride for Hackett. Every one will just be waiting for you after they hear about this."

He wheeled his horse out and spurred it into a dead run down the street, followed by Breed. Banner moved to the edge of the sidewalk.

"I didn't know what I was doing," he said. "It happened so fast I didn't know what I was doing."

"Because you still love the old man and you been work so hard you are jumpy as the jack rabbit," Tilfego said. "And I am glad you hit Garry. The hell with him."

"It's true, then. Julia told me. I guess I hadn't realized it. I've made Henry a laughingstock. Did you see his eyes, that last time he looked at me? Like I'd stabbed him or something."

"Is something you cannot help," Tilfego said softly.

Banner shook his head, broad shoulders stooped. "Maybe I'm wrong, Tilfego. Maybe there isn't really an eyewitness. Maybe I'm doing all this for nothing."

"You cannot give up now."

"I can't go on hurting Henry this way. He was right. I'm too impulsive. Get an idea and I jump. Don't care who I hurt or why. All I can think of is myself—"

"You are not think of yourself. Everything you do is for Jahzini."

"I'm beginning to doubt myself. I can't go on hurting him this way. If something doesn't break soon—"

He broke off, realizing Tilfego was not looking at him. He raised his head, following the man's gaze, out into the street. At first he thought it was Joe Garry returning. Then the rider pulled into the flickering light.

"Cristina."

She pulled her mare to a halt. Before he could step out to aid her, she swung down.

"I thought you'd want to know about Adakhai," she said. "Two of his people passed our *hogan* this afternoon with the news. They told me Adakhai had disappeared. Over a week ago he left by horseback for a hunting trip up near Navaho Mountain. He was going to stop at Tonalea and get his cousin. But he never got there. Some of the young men from Chin Lee tried to trail him. They lost his trail."

He stepped into the street, staring down at the troubled darkness of her eyes. "Eight or ten days isn't so long for a hunting trip that far north."

"But he did not appear at Tonalea. His cousin is still waiting there."

Tilfego was beside them, now, his eyes squinted thoughtfully. "Hackett know you thought Adakhai was the eyewitness?"

Banner turned to him. "Yes," he said. "Hackett knew."

They were all silent. The horse snorted. The kerosene torch spat softly. Tilfego moistened his lips before he spoke.

"I was pass by the roundup camp of Hackett on my return from army job. Arles and Big Red they was not there. A Mexican hand he say they been gone many days."

Slowly, heavily, Banner asked, "Would they know that country up there?"

"Arles would," Tilfego answered. "Remember when he was a kid. He kill a man in Tucson. He hide out around Navaho Mountain for two years. Then he hook up with Hackett and Hackett have the influence to get a self-defense ruling on it."

Banner's voice was dull with defeat. "I don't want to believe it."

"You put Jahzini out of Hackett's reach," Tilfego said. "This is all Hackett has got left. Without an eyewitness, you do not have a case."

Banner was staring beyond Cristina. "How could we ever do it?"

"A man he leave sign," Tilfego said.

"But the trail's over a week old. And even the Indians lost it."

Tilfego looked hurt. "You are give me the insult."

Banner shook his head. "I couldn't ask you to do it. If it's true, if Arles and Big Red are really up there—"

"Leave me out of good fight and I never call you *amigo* again," chuckled Tilfego. "You do not have to ask me. I volunteer."

The girl's skirts rustled softly. "I will go also."

Banner shook his head. "We can't take you. No telling how long it's going to be. Just tell us where the Indians lost the trail and anything else you can think of."

She hesitated. "They followed it as far as Dot Klish. You know how to find that. In the land beyond is where Adakhai's people lost his trail. It is sand country, and the wind had covered his tracks."

He nodded. "We'll start right away."

"Thank you, Lee. I must get back to my mother now." Her eyes clung to his a moment longer. Then she turned to Tilfego, putting her hand on his arm. Banner saw Tilfego's eyes widen. They held an indefinable, luminous expression. "You are very good," Cristina said. "It is my wish that more people realized how good."

She smiled up at him, a fleeting little smile, and then started to turn away. Banner held out his hand.

"Cristina."

She faced back quickly. "Yes?"

He stared down at the soft oval of her face, turned to burnished copper in the flickering lights. "Nothing," he said, awkwardly. "We'll let you know, as soon as we get back."

She seemed to understand. The smile came again, briefly, shyly. "Thank you, Lee."

Her skirts whirled and rustled as she swung up on the horse. She heeled it around, sent them a last look, and rode down the street. Banner finally turned to see that Tilfego was still staring after the girl with that shining look yet in his eyes. Banner grinned.

"You didn't ask her to marry you," he said. Tilfego did not seem to hear him. Banner put a hand on the man's beefy shoulder. "Tilfego?" he said.

The Mexican turned. "*Si?*" he asked blankly.

Banner frowned wonderingly at him. "Don't tell me."

Tilfego's primitive face colored with embarrassment. He looked at Banner, trying to grin. "*Que barbaridad,*" he said.

"Yes," Banner said. "What a barbarity."

Chapter Fifteen

Inch by Inch

THEY left before dawn the next morning. They rode north in a hot wind that seemed to be sweeping the world clean. The sand blew into their faces all day and all night and they had to stop every half hour to clean out the clogged nostrils of their horses.

North of the Corn River, north of the Hopi villages, farther north than Banner had ever been before, they began to ascend the Shonto Plateau.

Near the end of the second day they reached the tributary gorge called Dot Klish by the Navahos for the blue clay in its walls. Erosion had eaten out all the sand around the clay, leaving a labyrinth of weird blue shapes that covered the walls like twisted gargoyles waiting to pounce. The wind was still blowing. It had sifted three feet of sand into the bottom of Dot Klish. Banner pulled his animal to a halt.

"No wonder they lost him here. He might as well have walked in water."

Tilfego's eyes were squinted almost shut against the stinging sand. "If they trail him this far, it means he come into this canyon. He come from Chin Lee? That means he travel west. He was go to Tonalea? She is north. So he leave this canyon by either the west or the north."

They knew the canyon only ran a few miles, east and west. But that was a lot of ground to cover when you were looking for sign. They made camp at its east end, leaving the horses there, so they would not obliterate any of the marks left on the land. Then, on foot, they began their search. Slowly, painfully, they studied all the ground adjoining each exit through the north wall of the canyon. When daylight failed, they returned to their camp and ate and slept. They were up before dawn.

They worked through the forenoon, sweating under a brazen sun, faces whipped raw by the wind-blown sand. By late afternoon they were only a mile up the canyon, working on the fourth exit. It was a rocky gully, and one of the boulders rose like a jagged tooth from the sand covering the bottom. Tilfego squatted over the rock for ten minutes, giving its glittering surface a minute inspection.

"Lee," he said. Banner waded through the sand to him, staring down at the rock. He could see nothing. "The little hole," Tilfego said. "Something chip it out."

At last Banner made out the tiny pockmark in the rock, hardly bigger than a pinhead. He was filled with a great sense of helplessness. It was so tiny, so insignificant. Yet he had seen Tilfego's uncanny faculties at work before.

The tributary gully cut through the wall in a northwest direction, and the Mexican started working his way down its sandy bottom. Banner followed. Inch by inch. Foot by foot. Yard by yard. With the sun dying and the light failing and night coming again. But just before dark Tilfego found it. He stooped over a bench of sandstone, wet his finger, rubbed it across the surface. Then he looked at Banner and Banner went to him. It was a chip of granite, no larger than the head of a pin, glittering like a miniature jewel.

"A horseshoe could have chip it out

back there," Tilfego said. "It could have caught in the nail, be carried this far, be knock out again. Will do?"

"Will do."

Night again. Dinner again. Sleep again. Up with dawn and eating a cold breakfast and into the tributary gully with the first light of the sun. Working along the twisted walls and in the bottom where the sand was piled high as a man's knees. For half a day they worked, without finding another sign. Then the gully petered out and opened up and they were faced with a vast plain, cloaked densely with creosote.

"If a man he went through here he had to brush against that creosote somewhere," Tilfego said. "You start one side, I start the other. Cover all the ground in between."

It was a heartbreaking job. Again sand had drifted across the ground beneath the bushes, covering any tracks that might have been made. The bushes were knee-high, for the most part, and Banner had to squat all the time. His clothes were sodden with sweat, his back ached, he was dizzy with the intense heat. They met in the middle without having found anything.

"Dammit, Tilfego, maybe that was some animal we're tracking. Why don't we go on to Tonalea and ask if they saw him?"

The Mexican chuckled. "His own people do that. You are tracking now, *amigo*. Is not sit down and turn to page ten and find the rule. I have spent a week looking for one sign."

"But we haven't got the time. If Big Red and Arles are on his tail, we haven't got time."

"You tell me a better way, *amigo?*"

Banner drew a weary breath. "All right. What now?"

"Same thing."

Same thing. Bending their aching backs to the task again, studying the creosote and the greasewood and the cactus till their eyes burned and began to lose focus. No telling how much later it was that Banner found the cholla, stout-trunked, short-branched, covered thick with glistening spines that could stab like a dirk. Banner called Tilfego. The Mexican came.

"Does it look like that joint's been torn off recently?"

The Mexican stared at the healing end of the branch, chuckled, clapped Banner on the back. "A tracker you are. The spine she catch in something and pull the whole joint off." He glanced behind them. "Is almost due north from gully. We go in same direction. Somewhere that spine she drop off."

Half a mile on they found the cholla spine, broken, lying in an open patch of ground. A triumphant grin tilted Tilfego's eyes into that Oriental mask.

"Finally we know this he is man. There is nothing around here the spine could have brush off on. The man broke it when he pull it from his horse, or his saddle leather. Will do?"

Banner could not help his husky laugh. "Sure as hell, will do."

They had their direction now, and they clung to it. They got their horses and moved northward. They found more sign on the brush, but soon it got patchy, and finally ceased growing altogether, and they found themselves on the edge of a sand-flat that stretched beyond sight. They camped there that night and started hunting the next morning and after half a day Tilfego admitted there were times when the land hid all from a man. So they had to gamble. They moved on north across the sandy wasteland. They had used

up all the water in their canteens by now, and came across no new water holes. By noon Banner's throat was burning, the horses were spooky and wild with thirst.

In the late afternoon a great escarpment rose before them. And in the towering rock wall was the knife-blade crack of a canyon. They turned off their course toward it. Distance was deceptive, and it took them till sunset to reach the escarpment.

There was soft earth about the entrance of the gorge. It had recorded the imprints faithfully. They had been made by an unshod horse. Its right front hoof left the mark of a squeezed frog.

The two men stared down at it for a long time. Then their eyes lifted, met. Banner shook his head.

"I knew you were the best tracker in the world, but this is one I didn't think you could pull out of the hat."

They gigged their jaded horses into the rock-walled chasm. The sky was a tortured thread of turquoise above them, striped with crimsoned cloud banners. Against this, the circling birds were silhouetted darkly. Banner looked at Tilfego, felt something tighten in his chest. Without a word they heeled their fretting animals into a sluggish trot. A few hundred yards on, the canyon formed an elbow turn.

Rounding it, they startled the feeding buzzards. The birds rose into the air with a funeral whir, a ghastly squawking. The smell of putrefying meat almost gagged Banner. But there was enough hide left on the carcass to tell its original color.

It was the bay.

Reluctantly, Tilfego stepped off his horse and walked toward the carcass. Grimacing with the stench, he forced himself to stand over the dead animal, studying the signs.

"She fell hard." He pointed to the earth at one side. "There Adakhai he hit and roll and get to his feet."

He began to follow the tracks. They led up a talus slope to a ridge of caprock. Here he stopped, beckoning Banner to bring the horses. Banner gigged the animals up to him.

"What do you think?" Banner asked.

"I think somebody they shoot. Hit horse instead of Indian. He run up here. I could try to follow his sign. But an Indian on foot is the hardest thing in the world to track."

"What else can we do?"

"Look at our horse. Crazy for water. Smell it somewhere near."

"I guess you're right," Banner said. "We'll find his sign at the sink."

"Not find his sign, even if he go there. But if they are follow him, their sign we will see."

They let the horses have their heads. The beasts led them unerringly down the twisting gorge. Soon they reached the western mouth of the canyon, cut into another skyscraping wall of rock, and rode out into rough benchlands of rusty sandstone. The mesa was not far behind them when Tilfego reined his horse in. His head was lifted and his splayed nostrils were fluttering.

"Now listen," Banner said. "Not out here!"

Tilfego asked angrily, "Do not these horse know when there is water near?" He thumped his chest. "Then Tilfego he know when there is *chilipiquine* near."

"All right. So you know. We haven't got time to look for them—"

"Tilfego he always has time. I look around, I sniff the air, I turn the corner. Hola! Chili peppers."

"Tilfego, this may mean a man's life!"

The Mexican settled sullenly in the saddle. Pouting like a child, he grunted.

"Very well. No *chilipiquines* today."

They wound on through the broken benches, with the horses fighting to break into a run. Finally they reached the lip of a drop-off and looked down into the shallow valley ahead, where the lake lay. Banner had never been here before, but he recognized it as Red Lake, named for the ruddy sandstone surrounding it. As the horses broke into an eager scramble toward the water, Banner saw the sagging Studebaker wagon at the edge of the water. An old Navaho, wrapped to his chin in a blanket, sat on the seat. The horses had been unhitched and led to the lake. Standing beside them was the figure of a girl.

"What I tell you?" Tilfego thumped his chest.

"All right, you old horse thief," Banner said.

They could not hold their horses so they let them run right into the water and drink their fill, before trying to talk with the Indians. When Banner's animal had finished, he rode over to the wagon, stepped off, loosened the cinch. The girl had brought her team back to put them in harness again, and after the formal greeting was over, Banner asked them where they were from. She said they were from Tonalea. Her grandfather had dreamed of bear during the summer, and was very sick. He could be cured by the ceremony of the Mountain Chant, and that was why they were traveling south. A Mountain Chant was to be held near Yellow Gap.

Banner asked her if she had seen any men during the journey, an Indian, or two white men. She said her grandfather had seen something last night. Banner spoke to the old man. The Indian started a quavering oration. The girl went around to hitch up the traces on the other side. It took Banner a long time to pin the old Indian down to the fact that the only people he had seen were the ones in his dreams.

Disgustedly, Banner turned around. The girl was not in sight, and Tilfego's horse stood ground-hitched and empty-saddled a few feet off. Banner heard a giggle from behind the covered wagon. He walked around the tailgate. The Mexican was rubbing noses with the girl.

"Tilfego."

The man looked up in surprise, then grinned at Banner. "That is the way the Digger Indians do it, *amigo*."

"These people don't know anything. We've got to go on."

"A Zuni tell me. He say he learn it from a Digger Indian."

"Tilfego."

Pouting, the Mexican walked back to his horse with Banner. They led the animals to the lake again, and while Banner filled the canteens, Tilfego began hunting for sign, following the shore eastward. He finally stopped, hunkering down.

"Adakhai?" Banner asked.

Tilfego pointed to the prints. "These are two shod horses. See the left hind shoe on this one. Sharp edges. Nails nice and clear. Want to bet?"

"On what?"

"That she is a new shoe. That a week ago she was change for a shoe with three nails gone."

"You mean Arles?"

"I mean Arles."

They followed the tracks of the shod hoofs northward, through a broken country, a country of giant mesas, of tortured canyons. When it grew too dark to see they ate supper. When the moon came up they started again.

Nowhere could they find Adakhai's trail. But Arles and Big Red would not have gone farther north unless they were following the Indian. And if Tilfego could not find Adakhai's trail, the other two men certainly couldn't. There was but one logical answer. Arles and Big Red were following the boy himself, rather than his tracks. Adakhai was on foot, and they were ahorse, and though he had been able to keep out of their reach, he had not been able to get out of their sight.

This knowledge filled Banner with a sick foreboding. It could not last long, that way. It drove the two of them, when the moon rose, to follow the tracks of Arles and Big Red through the night, until the moon died and there was no more light. At dawn they were on the trail again, with Navaho Mountain in sight far ahead, lonely and serene in the desert solitude.

The sun rose. Weariness bore them down in the saddle. Still they pushed ahead.

Here Arles and Red had stopped, had held their horses in the cover of twisted juniper. Adakhai must have holed up across the canyon, in the rocks over there, and kept the white men off with his gun, for here in the sand were two spent bullets. And then the Indian must have started running once more, for the two horses had bolted suddenly from their cover. And the white men had shot at Adakhai, for here were more spent slugs, of different caliber than the first.

And then Tilfego found the dark spots. He pulled his horse up, staring down, and finally got off. Banner could see the stains against the bone-white sand, like faded rust. Tilfego squatted there a long time, running his finger over it.

"Blood," he said. "Days old. He was hit bad, to lose this much. He cannot go much farther. I think we hitch our animals here. Whatever we find, it will be close ahead."

Chapter Sixteen

Bullets—and a Bowie

LEAVING their animals, they took their Winchesters and worked their way slowly through the brush-choked canyon, finding more spots of blood in the sand. Then the canyon broadened, its walls receding into great broken benches.

And high on those benches, on the west side, were the buildings. They were of adobe and rocks, ancient, crumbling, so close to the earth in hue and texture that they seemed to have grown from the land. In countless places their walls had fallen in, and the rubble supported the smashed ends of fallen beams, immense and smoke-blackened.

They were the same kind of aboriginal cliff-houses Banner had seen at Chaco Canyon and Canyon de Chelly, deserted by their makers centuries before the white man had come to this country. The stains of dried blood led

up through the benches and into the buildings, while the prints of the two shod horses continued on down the canyon, disappearing around a turn. The picture was plain to Banner.

Adakhai had taken refuge in the cliff houses like a wounded animal, unable to run any longer, finding a hole to crawl into where they couldn't get at him. And they were down in the canyon somewhere, keeping the boy up in the ruins till he died of his wounds, or starved to death.

"Those *chingados*." Tilfego's voice had an ugly sound.

Then they did not speak for a space, gripped in the musty silence of the ancient place, a silence so intense it almost hurt. Banner studied the canyon with slitted eyes, trying to decide where Arles and Big Red were. There was not much cover on the sloping, broken side of the canyon opposite the cliff houses. They had probably taken up their watch in the ruins along the bottom. Above these ruins were two more levels of buildings, and high above the top level, beneath a deeply overhanging cliff, was one lone, circular structure.

"Looks like one of those *kivas* these people used to worship in," Banner said. "It's the most logical place for Adakhai to be. They couldn't reach him from above. That cliff hangs clear over it. And he's got command of the whole canyon below him."

Tilfego nodded. "The bloodstain they lead up that way."

Banner pointed to a series of steps built into one of the walls. "That stairway leads to the second level. If I can get up there I'll be above Big Red and Arles."

"You forget the Indian. He is liable to shoot you just as quick as them. He can see you even on that second level."

"Not right back against the wall."

"You are guessing."

"All right, so I'm guessing. I'll take the chance. It's almost dark already."

Tilfego shook his head. "Henry is right. Always jumping in without a look—"

"So I'm always jumping in. If you don't want to—"

Tilfego slapped him on the back, grinning broadly. "Slack up, *hombre*. Who would like you any other way? Is what make you Lee Banner. Go ahead and jump. I am right on your back."

Banner could not help grinning, sheepishly. He studied the buildings a moment longer. He looked at Tilfego. The Mexican nodded. Banner lunged out into the open.

There was thirty feet of bone-white sand between the brush and the walls. He was halfway across when the shot crashed. It came from the *kiva*, high above. He saw sand spew up five feet to his right.

Before it had settled, another shot smashed. This came from the ruins at the bottom of the canyon, but it went even wider. Then the steady crash of Tilfego's Winchester blotted out all the other firing, and Banner had reached the wall.

Crouched here, he was cut off from Adakhai above, and from Arles and Big Red in the canyon. Ahead of him a flanking wall was molded into steps that led to the roof of a building. And from the roof was another stairway that led to the bench above. He would not be exposed to Adakhai till he reached that roof. But as soon as he left this wall, Arles and Big Red would have a shot at him. The knowledge brought clammy sweat to his palms.

And what if he did gain the bench? Maybe he was mistaken. Maybe there was no cover from Adakhai up there. Maybe—

What the hell!

He sucked in air and jumped out and ran for the steps. There was one shot, from the direction of Arles and Red. It ate a piece of adobe from the wall behind Banner.

Then Tilfego's gun was going again, filling the canyon with an awesome din. Banner reached the stairway, was scrambling up the narrow steps and jumping onto the roof.

It was one of the few roofs left intact but it almost gave way beneath him and the instant he reached it Adakhai's gun smashed from the *kiva* above and kicked earth out of the roof a foot from Banner.

He ran on across the trembling roof and started up the second tier of stairs. He was out of sight of the white men now. Tilfego had shifted his fire to the *kiva*, and was keeping Adakhai down.

Then the top step crumbled beneath Banner.

He felt himself falling and threw himself in a wild dive for the lip of the bench just above. He reached it, sliding across it on his belly. At the same time, Tilfego must have run out of bullets. The echoes of the shots rolled down the canyon. The silence came while Banner was still sprawled on his belly on the edge of the bench.

And then, like a thunderclap, Adakhai's first shot.

He felt the smash of a blow against his foot and didn't even know what it meant because he was rolling, flopping over and over, with the gun crashing again and again from above, until he came up against the wall of the buildings on that second level. He lay there, cut off from Adakhai again, gasping.

He felt no pain in his foot and saw that the bullet had only knocked the heel of his boot off. He got to his hands and knees and then stood up against the wall, chest swelling in its need for air.

The Indian had quit firing once more. He began to work his way swiftly down the front walls of these buildings toward the north end of the canyon. He passed doorways so low he would have had to stoop double to get through. His feet crunched through shards of pottery that had been broken hundreds of years before. Finally the long adobe wall angled out toward the edge of the bench and brought him abruptly into sight of the man below.

It was Big Red, crouched on a rooftop, behind the parapet formed by an extension of the wall. He was not looking for Banner. He was watching Tilfego.

The Mexican must have figured Banner was in a position to cover him by now. He had run across that stretch of sand and was beginning to work his way through the lower level of the city.

Banner saw him duck across a courtyard, run into a long passage, pass through its end. It opened into a roofless room. Tilfego hesitated at the end of the passage, then darted into the open.

"Tilfego—"

Banner's warning shout was cut off by the blast of Big Red's gun. Banner saw Tilfego halt in surprise, look vainly for a man he couldn't see, then wheel and run for the doorway from which he had come. Banner saw Big Red pump his lever, and he swung his own gun around till the blot of Red's body covered his sights, and fired.

The man shouted in pain and flopped over. The weight of his great body hitting the flimsy roof made it collapse and he fell through with it. Tilfego gained the safety of the doorway and checked himself, wheeling back.

"Arles," Red shouted. His voice sounded muffled. "They broke my arm. Come and get me, damn you. They broke my arm."

There was scurrying movement below Banner which he could not see. He heard husky cursing. Tilfego took a chance, knowing Banner was covering him now, and scuttled once more from the doorway, crossing the courtyard. Banner moved on down the bench, keeping in the shelter of walls that would protect him from the Indian above. Finally the buildings ended, the bench ran around a point where the canyon turned, cutting Banner off from Adakhai's sight. Then the bench became a shelving trail that led down into the canyon.

Banner could hear them running down below, the rattle of rubble underfoot, the crunch of that broken pottery. There was a wild whinny from a horse, somewhere within the ruins. He stopped, trying to place it. The frantic beat of hoofs filled the canyon. He heard Tilfego calling him, and answered. The man appeared in a few moments, coming from a black doorway.

"You save my neck on that one," grinned the Mexican. "Must have hit one of them good. He left his rifle."

"They're through, then," Banner said. "They must know they can't do anything with one of them wounded." He moved close to the point, staring up at the corner of the high *kiva*.

"You cannot go up there," Tilfego said. "He shoot you as quick as them."

Banner moved closer to the point. "If he's still losing blood another night might kill him," Banner said. "We've got to get him now, Tilfego." He raised his voice. "Adakhai? *Tsi Tsosi. Dancahas, shichi handsi.*"

There was a protracted silence, then the answer came, a feeble cry in the thin air. "*Chindash.*"

"What you say?" Tilfego asked.

"I told him I was Yellow Hair, asked him how bad he was hurt."

"What he say?"

"Go to hell."

Neither of them spoke after that. The silence of the gorge was tomblike. Night was settling velvety darkness into the canyon. Banner was trying to think of the right words.

Finally he began to talk, telling Adakhai that they only wanted to help him, that they had chased away the men who had done this to him, that he would probably die if he stayed up there much longer. Then he stopped and waited for the answer. For a long time he waited, in the velvet darkness, in the musty silence. There was no answer. Finally Tilfego snorted disgustedly.

"Is how much good the talking does with them."

"Then we'll have to go up there," Banner said. "The only way is right through the buildings."

"Do not be *loco*. They would have get him if it was possible."

"They didn't have to take a chance," Banner said. "All they wanted him to do was die, and they could wait for that. I want him to live. And I can't wait. We haven't got much time before moonrise. You cover me from below. Don't shoot to hit him. Just try to keep him down while I'm in the open spots."

He handed Tilfego his rifle. He turned to go back up the trail, around the point, against the front walls of the buildings on the second bench, which hid him from the *kiva* above. It was so dark he could see but a few feet in front of him.

He could not find any more outside stairways to the next level. But he found a notched beam in a room, and knew it was one of their ladders. He finally made out the hole in the ceiling, a vague square, only faintly lighter than the blackness of the roof. The beam was almost too heavy to lift. He finally got it up, leaning slantwise against one corner of the hole.

It was a precarious climb. The beam threatened to roll beneath him any moment. He finally reached the hole, lifted himself through onto the roof. His foot hit the tip of the notched beam. He heard a crunching sound, the corner of the hole gave way, the beam fell with an echoing crash.

Before the sound was dead, there was a wild yell above him. A gun made its smashing detonation. He heard the bullet strike the roof somewhere to his left. He was completely exposed here, with the wall of the *kiva* ten feet away, and no cover between.

He had that moment of choice, with the impulse running savagely through him to drop back down through the hole.

Then Tilfego's gun began to clatter from down below. Banner heard bullets chopping into the wall of the *kiva*.

He lunged to his feet and headed in a wild run for the round building. Adakhai fired again, but Tilfego's gun was still going, and would give the Indian no time to aim. It was so dark that Banner only made a shadowy impression of a target anyway. And he reached the wall, throwing himself up against it, panting heavily.

Tilfego's firing ceased abruptly. The echoes rolled down the canyon, dying.

The Indian was right above him now, on the roof of the *kiva*, behind the parapet formed by the top of the wall. In order to shoot Banner, he would have to poke the rifle over the side. And Banner would see it against the sky.

It was the only way Banner could get him. The wall was about seven feet high, and he could reach the edge with his hands. But it would be suicide to try and get up onto it. He had to bring the boy down.

Deliberately, he sucked in a deep breath, and exhaled in a noisy gust. He heard a faint scraping from above. His body stiffened.

Then he saw it, sky-lighted above him. Like a thin strip of darkness, barely darker than the heavens. He lunged up, knocking the rifle aside as it went off, grabbing it in both hands and throwing all his weight against it. He heard the wild shout.

Adakhai must have held on too long. He plummeted down on Banner. The lawyer had that last instant to throw himself from beneath the Indian. But the thought of those wounds flashed through his mind. He let Adakhai strike him, cushioning the fall.

It drove him to the ground, knocked the wind from him. He caught at the Indian's flailing arms. Adakhai rolled over and began fighting immediately. It caused them to flop over and over down the slope leading to the top of the buildings below. Banner saw one of the Indian's hands slap at his belt, saw the flash of a knife.

As they rolled out onto the roof, he was beneath. But he lunged up with

both hands and caught the man's arm as the Indian raised it to strike. They were still rolling and Banner came on top, throwing all his weight against the arm.

It twisted Adakhai's wrist back on itself. He shouted in pain. The knife slipped from his hand. Banner tried to keep the Indian beneath him, but he held onto the arm too long. With a tigerish lunge, Adakhai flopped them over again, and Banner could not release his hold soon enough to stop himself from going under. Then Adakhai tore his wrist free and his hands found the white man's throat.

Banner's eyes swelled in their sockets with the pressure. His head was smashed against the roof. With the Indian straddling him, he fought to tear the sinewy hands free, battered wildly at the catgut muscle of the arms. But he came against the same savage strength he had met at Chin Lee. His head seemed to be bursting with the pressure. The night spun about him. In a last desperate effort, he twisted against the throttling hands and drove a blow for Adakhai's belly. He heard the explosive gasp torn from the Indian.

It jerked the hands off Banner's neck, unbalanced Adakhai in that moment. Banner heaved him over and sprawled on top. He let his whole weight sag down onto the Indian and lay there, gasping, drained. For a moment Adakhai was too spent to struggle.

Then, in a new burst of savagery, he tried to fight free. Banner caught his arm, twisted it around into a hammerlock.

"Do not struggle, you fool," he said in Navaho. "We come to help you. We made your pursuers leave by horseback. Can't you understand that?"

"*Tlish bizedeigi, yishi,*" Adakhai gasped, still fighting. "You are the spit of a snake. I swear it."

The Indian's struggles grew gradually weaker, however, and finally he stopped, lying slack beneath Banner. His wounds had started to bleed again and Banner was soaked with blood.

"Tilfego," Banner called. "I've got him. Bring a rope."

Tilfego had to get the rope off the horses, and he led them back to the ruins on the lower level. Then he brought a coiled dally up and they tied Adakhai hand and foot.

"Is helluva thing to do with wounded man," Tilfego said.

"It's the only way we can keep him quiet," Banner said.

Adakhai lay on his back, staring at them balefully. In the moonlight, he looked like a wild animal. His hair was matted and dirty, the bones stood out so whitely in his gaunt face that it looked like a skull. There were two wounds. The one in the shoulder was clean. But when Banner unwound the dirty strip of buckskin from the boy's thigh he saw that the leg was badly swollen.

"He'll die if that blood poisoning isn't stopped," Banner said.

"You mean dig the bullet out?" Tilfego shook his head. "If you do that and he die you have every Navaho on reservation after your scalp."

"He'll die if I don't do it. Maybe you'd rather not be involved."

"Don't be a *burro*," Tilfego said. He pulled his bowie. "You can use my knife."

They built a fire and heated the blade till it was red. The boy made no sound. His body lunged up just once when the blade entered. From then on

he lay rigid, his eyes open, staring at the sky. Banner finally got the bullet out, and sank back, as sodden with sweat as the Indian. Tilfego brought him the water he had boiled and while Banner cleaned the wound he sent the man after as much prickly pear as he could find.

Tilfego came back with a hatful of prickly-pear paddles. Banner pounded it to a pulp between two rocks and mixed it with water till it was paste and put this poultice on the boy's wounds, binding it with his neckerchief and strips of blanket.

"Jahzini taught me that," he said. "The prickly pear will draw the pus out like nothing you ever saw." When he was finished, he went over and sank down on the parapet of the wall, utterly played out. "I feel like I've run a hundred miles."

"What you need is a quart of coffee," Tilfego said. "Let's get the boy down into one of these houses and then I'll fix something to eat."

They carried the boy as gently as possible down one of the wall stairways and into a room that was still intact. Then Tilfego built a fire and fixed coffee and heated tortillas and made a stew from some of their smoked meat. The Indian would not eat, and Banner did not want to force anything on him in his weakened condition. They spent the night sleeping and watching in shifts. The Indian would still not eat, at breakfast.

"We've got to get him to a doctor," Banner told Tilfego. "You can get a wagon at Tonalea. Bring a couple of men with you and a stretcher, and we can carry him out to the wagon. It should take you three or four days."

"Anything you want me to leave?"

"All the coffee. That bottle of whisky. Food for at least four days. And that pack of cards you always carry."

Tilfego frowned. "They will do you no good."

"We'll see," Banner said. "They don't call him The Gambler for nothing."

Chapter Seventeen

The Game

A LITTLE while after Tilfego was gone, the boy began to get delirious. He thrashed around and fought the ropes and Banner could not keep the blanket on him. Then he stopped sweating and began to shudder with chills, whimpering like a lost puppy. Banner threw all the blankets on him and finally he started sweating again. It lasted all day and by the time the boy finally dropped into a deep sleep, Banner was trembling with tension and fatigue.

He went to sleep himself and did not wake up till the middle of the night. The boy was still sleeping and Banner walked out onto the bench which overlooked the ruins below. It was a weird ghost city in the moonlight. He sat down against the wall.

He fell asleep sitting there and was awakened by the first daylight. It showed him nothing but empty ruins below, and he went back inside. The boy was conscious, lucid again, watching him from eyes black with hate.

Banner made some ash cakes from meal and water and fried them in the pan with bacon. Then he put the coffee on and let it boil till its fragrance mingled with the rich odor of crackling bacon. He saw Adakhai lick his lips.

He put the frying pan beside the Indian, poured a cup of coffee. "*Ko adi yil,*" he said. "You may eat."

The Navaho closed his eyes, his lips became a thin line of defiance. Banner sat cross-legged beside him and took one of the cakes out of the pan, putting a strip of bacon across it, eating. He finished and went out on the bench again, spending fifteen minutes in a search of the canyon.

When he went back in, the cakes and bacon still lay uneaten in the pan beside the boy, cold and congealed in their own grease. Banner wrapped them in a piece of buckskin, scoured the pan with sand. Then he sat down against the wall and got out Tilfego's cards and began idly shuffling them. He saw the boy's glance run involuntarily to the pasteboards.

"I'm pretty good at coon-can," Banner said. "Never been beat in Mexican Hat." No answer. He began to play solitaire. "Maybe poker's your game. I bet I could beat you. In the past I played with Jahzini. You would like him. It is a wonderful thing when a Navaho will take in a *belinkana* and treat him as his own son."

"You lie!" It was torn from the boy. His face was contorted. "No Navaho would take in a white man!"

"Would I know the story of the Emergence, if I had not lived with your people?" Banner asked. "I remember it well. Jahzini was a wonderful storyteller. It is told that there were four worlds, one above the other. There was a great flood in the underworld, people were driven up by the waters. First Man and First Woman brought with them earth from the mountains of the world below. With this they made the sacred mountains of Navaho land. To the east they placed the sacred mountain Sisnajinni. They adorned it with white shell and fastened it to the earth with an arrow from the War God's bow—"

"They fastened it with a bolt of lightning—" Adakhai broke off suddenly, staring angrily at Banner.

Banner looked down at the cards so the boy could not see his eyes. He had not forgotten about the bolt of lightning.

"Jahzini told me a long time ago. The details are not all clear. So they attached Sisnajinni with a bolt of lightning. And to the west they placed the sacred mountain Doki-oslid. They adorned it with haliotis shell and fastened it to the earth with a moonbeam—"

"A sunbeam."

"Yes. A sunbeam. I remember now. And when they had finished putting down all the sacred mountains the holy songs were sung. Jahzini used to sing the Mountain Song to us. He was a wonderful singer of songs." Banner leaned back and closed his eyes and began to chant.

"Piki yo-ye, Daichl nantai
Piki yo-ye, Sa-a naral . . ."

Singing of the Mountain, Chief of All Mountains, thither I go, living forever, blessings bestowing. Singing all the verses, almost forgetting Adakhai, forgetting where he was, because it was bringing back those half-forgotten nights when he had sat with Jahzini in his *hogan*, when he had sat with the old man, listening to him sing these ancient chants, transported in space and time by the old Navaho's mystic incantations, as only a child could be transported, until he was one with the gods, coming up through the hollow reed from the underworld, seeing Haliotis Maiden and Twilight Youth, riding

with the Sun God on his turquoise horse, or his silver horse. . . .

When Banner was finally finished, there was no sound in the room. He did not open his eyes for a while. When he did he found the Indian watching him with a strange expression.

"How you sing." It was barely a whisper, from Adakhai. "I could almost believe you had our blood."

"I have." Banner held out his hand so the Navaho could see the scar on his palm. "Jahzini and I became brothers. It was after I saved him from a mountain lion. He cut my palm and his palm and we clasped hands."

The boy did not answer. But he continued to watch Banner. The balefulness did not return to his eyes. Banner went over and heated the coffee and cakes and bacon again and set them before the boy once more.

"Perhaps you would like to eat now. If you are too weak, I will help you."

"I am not weak."

"You will be if you don't eat."

Adakhai looked at the coffee. At last he rolled on his side and picked up the cup. He spilled some, lifting it to his lips. But Banner knew the boy's pride, and made no move to help.

The effort of eating left the boy weak and listless. Banner changed the poultices and found that some of the infection had been drawn out. In the afternoon, the boy went to sleep. Banner went out onto the bench to watch. With dusk falling, he went back inside. The boy was awake.

"You think those others are still about?" he asked.

"No."

"Why did they want to kill me?"

"One of them is the man who murdered Wallace Wright. He thinks you saw him kill Wright. If you told, he would hang for it."

"And you saved my life."

"I want you to tell if you saw the murder. It will save Jahzini's life."

"You are helping Jahzini because you are his friend. But you are not my friend."

"Only in your own heart am I not your friend," Banner said. "My heart has no hatred."

The boy turned restlessly to one side. "White men killed my father. I vowed I would not forget that."

"If an Indian killed your father, would you hate all Indians?"

Something that was almost surprise shone in Adakhai's eyes. Then he veiled it. Banner built a fire for supper, letting the Indian think it over. When they were eating, he asked Adakhai how Big Red and Arles had known where to find him.

"Some Navahos from Chin Lee went down to the trading-post on horses," Adakhai said. "They must have passed through Hackett's cattle camp and made mention that I had just left by horseback for Navaho Mountain."

Banner poured the coffee. "I guess Arles knew the country well enough to figure you'd come up here by way of Dot Klish."

Adakhai nodded. "They waited for me at Dot Klish. They shot at me there and missed me. From Dot Klish there is no trail on north. A man may go any way he wishes."

"That is why your own people did not know where to look for you."

"I suppose so. I ran for Zuni Canyon. But the two *belinkana* got on the rim above me there and shot again. They hit my horse. I tried to lose them by hiding my tracks after that. But they kept me always in sight. With my gun I prevented them from getting

too close. Then one of them hit me in the canyon back there. I had been up here many days when you came. I would have been dead by now."

Banner scoured the pan after they had eaten and then sat down to begin idly shuffling the cards again. He nodded at the knife they had taken from the boy. "That is a beautiful weapon."

"Those are cannel coal beads in the hilt," Adakhai said. "I won it from a chief."

"I have five dollars," Banner said, taking the silver from his pocket. He saw the Indian's eyes begin to glow. It was much more than the worth of the knife. Then the Indian lay back, shaking his head. Banner smiled thinly. "When I go to Mexican Hat I will say that The Gambler has been misnamed," he said. "From now on they will know him as Old Squaw."

"*Tchindi!*" With an explosive oath, the Indian lurched up on an elbow, staring hotly at Banner.

"I have two Mexican dollars, also," Banner said, adding them to the others.

The Indian stared at the little stack, winking in the gloom. Banner picked up the knife and tossed it to him. The Indian stared down at it, the temptation working through his face.

"Coon-can?" Banner asked.

The Indian dropped off his elbow, but remained on his side, breathing shallowly. Finally, he said, "Poker."

Banner shuffled again, let the Indian cut, then dealt. Adakhai studied his cards, then pushed the knife out between them. Banner had a pair of tens. He put two dollars beside the knife.

"Will that call you?"

"Yes. I'll have two cards."

Banner dealt the Indian a pair, drew three himself. He didn't get another ten. Adakhai took off his bowguard and added it to the pot. Banner put another dollar in.

"Call you."

Adakhai showed two pairs, kings high. Banner put down his two tens. Without changing expression, the Indian pulled the knife, the bowguard, the three dollars back to him. Banner passed the deck over. As the Indian dealt, Banner found his eyes going to the man's *bizha*, which hung from his belt by a thong. It was the personal fetish every Navaho carried. For a gambler it was a piece of turquoise, because Noholike, the gambling god, had always been made successful with it.

Turquoise alone was of great value to the Navahos, for its deep religious significance. Banner had known men to trade a horse for a single turquoise. The fact that it represented a man's personal fetish made it doubly valuable. Banner felt sure that if he could win it, the boy would gladly pay any price for its return. Even to telling if he had seen Arles kill Wright.

"You opening?"

Banner glanced up to see the Indian watching him narrowly over the tops of his cards. Banner picked up his hand, saw a pair of queens, opened with a dollar. The game went on, lasting long into the night. When they finally quit, the Indian had won Banner's money, his ten-dollar Stetson, and the silver buckle off his belt.

Adakhai was more cheerful the next morning. After breakfast his eyes kept going to the cards and when Banner suggested playing another game, the Indian accepted eagerly.

It went back and forth, as it had the night before. Banner won his money and his hat back, lost the money again.

They ate lunch. After lunch they played again, and Banner lost his Winchester. The Indian's gambling fever was running high. He was dealing, when Banner got the hand.

It was three kings, an eight, and a four. The right draw would give him a full house. He found his eyes lifting to the Indian's *bizha* once more. He realized this might be the time.

"How much is my shirt worth to you?" he asked.

The Indian glanced at the stack of seven dollars. "A dollar."

"I'll open with it."

"Raise you a dollar."

"How much for my boots?"

"Four dollars."

"Then they'll raise you a dollar."

"I'll raise another dollar."

"How much are my pants worth?"

"A dollar."

"I'll call you with them," Banner said. "And I'll take one card."

He discarded a four. The Indian dealt to him, then dealt himself two cards. Banner picked up his card. It was an eight.

Sitting there, looking at his full house, he could feel the blood pounding at his temples. It was hard to keep his face expressionless. But he could not help thinking of the *bizha* again. He knew it was within his reach, now.

"I'll open with my hat," he said.

"I have bet all the money. Will the rifle and my bowguard raise you?"

Banner nodded, studying the Indian's face. He could not believe the man would have gone along this far on a bluff. Adakhai had not been playing that way. Then the Indian held a good hand. Was it good enough to carry him all the way to the *bizha?*

"My clothes are all in the pot," Banner said. "Will my revolver raise you?"

"I'll take it. Will the silver buckle off your belt and my bracelet raise you?"

Banner's mouth felt dry. He knew this was the moment. He might well be gambling for Jahzini's life.

"All I have left is my horse and saddle," he said. "I'll raise you with both of them."

He saw the light go out of Adakhai's eyes. "I thought you were bluffing, and would not risk them," he said in a low voice. "I have nothing with which to call your bet."

"You have your *bizha.*"

Banner saw surprise widen Adakhai's eyes. Then the Navaho masked it, the sullen woodenness returning to his face. "I would not bet my *bizha* against the wealth of three men. I dreamed that Noholike came to me and said that if I would go to Bead Spring I would find the *bizha* for which I would be named. I found this turquoise. From that day on my name was changed from Slim Man to The Gambler, and I have been invincible."

"You mean you are going to let me take this whole pot without a fight?" Banner asked.

The Indian shook his head, without answering.

Banner said disgustedly, "What power can your *bizha* have if you fear to wager it? If you let me have the pot now, how will you ever be invincible again? How can they call you The Gambler when you are afraid to gamble?"

The Indian came up onto his elbow, eyes smoldering. The lawyer waved his hand at the pot.

"With the horse and saddle, it must be worth three hundred dollars. What will your people think when they hear you did not have the courage to gam-

ble for such wealth? They will laugh behind your back. They will change your name to Man Without Heart."

Banner could see the combination of pride and gambling fever gnawing at the Indian. His mouth began to work. His face was flushed. At last it was too much for him. He unfastened the turquoise. Holding it in his palm, he looked down at it.

For that instant, the anger, the bitterness, the pride were washed from his face. His eyes grew dark with all the primitive beliefs and superstitions and fears bound up in the *bizha.* It did something to Banner. He had realized objectively how much the fetish meant to Adakhai. Now he felt it emotionally.

It was as if the fetish was his own. It was as if the warp and woof of his life had been bound up with that bit of turquoise for as long as he could remember. The relationship had no comparison in the white man's world, except, perhaps, his belief in God. The immense value of the *bizha,* the crushing possibility of its loss, was borne against Banner with all its overwhelming ramifications.

He felt like a fool. Dodge was right. Always going off half-cocked. He had made the same mistake at Chin Lee. Knowing enough about the Indian's reactions to use them against him, but not taking the time, not going deeply enough into them to see what the end result would mean to the Indian.

Could he really use the *bizha* to force the truth about Yellow Gap from Adakhai? Or would he gain nothing but the Indian's undying enmity by winning it? He searched Adakhai's face for the answer. And as the Navaho put the turquoise down, and raised his eyes, with the intense bitterness returning to his face, Banner had his answer.

He knew he had only one chance left. The Indian had called his bet. It was Banner's obligation to show the first cards. His only hope was that the immense strain of the moment would blind Adakhai to custom.

"What have you got?" Banner asked.

The Indian hesitated. Then he turned his hand over. All he had was two pairs.

Banner put his full house on the floor, face down. "You win," he said. "Your *bizha* is truly invincible."

The Indian stared blankly at Banner for an instant. Then, with a whoop, he flopped over, clawing for the turquoise. Holding it tightly in his fist, he gazed at the heap of loot. Then he laughed. Like a child he laughed, all the dour impassivity gone from his face. Too elated to question Banner's hand, he lay back, weakened by his effort, still laughing.

"You are lucky you did not wager that beautiful yellow hair. I would have had to scalp you."

Banner smiled, picking up his cards and shuffling them into the deck. "It is as I told Tilfego. They do not call you The Gambler for nothing."

Chapter Eighteen

Inquisition

TILFEGO came back with the wagon the third day. Banner saw them moving down among the ruins and waited for them on the bench. Tilfego and a pair of Indians climbed up the precarious tier of steps molded into the wall and gained the bench. The Mexican introduced the

Navahos as Hosteen Red Shirt, a half-breed trader from Tonalea, and Running Man, Adakhai's cousin. They all stooped through the low door and crowded into the room. Tilfego stared blankly at the heap of loot beside Adakhai. The Indian grinned broadly, thumping Banner's saddle.

"*Kad xozozo nza yadolel—*"

"What he say?" asked Tilfego, as the Indian rattled on.

"He says I'll continue to live in peace as long as I gamble like that," Banner grinned. "He says I must come up to his *hogan* at Chin Lee and we will have another game. He says he won my horse and my saddle and all my clothes. He says you will have to loan me some money when we reach Tuba, unless you want me to walk home naked."

Tilfego threw his head back and let it shake the rafters. The Indians were laughing too. Adakhai lay back on his pallet and laughed till he was too weak to go on.

"I never think I see this," Tilfego said. "Like you been pardners all your life. How did you make it, Lee?"

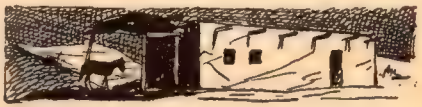
"There's some willow saplings for stretcher poles down the canyon," Banner said. "I'll tell you while we chop them down."

As they stooped out through the door, Tilfego turned to Banner. "If he feel like this toward you, now—"

Banner shook his head darkly. "I haven't gotten him to tell me whether he was at Yellow Gap, yet."

Tilfego clapped Banner on the back. "Never mind. You cannot expect the miracle overnight."

Tilfego and Banner rode as far as Tuba with the wagon, where there was a doctor. Tilfego had to loan Banner all his army money to get a ratty Navaho pony and some old clothes and boots. They impressed upon the Indians the necessity of keeping Adakhai hidden from Hackett till he was well. The Indians assured them Adakhai would be kept safe, and they took their leave. It was two days back to Mexican Hat. They arrived late in the evening.



Tilfego wanted to see Celestina, so Banner left him at Blackstrap Kelly's and went on down to the two-room adobe on the Street of the Beggars. He was thinking about bed when the knock came at the door.

It was Ramirez, the husband of Dodge's cook, a furtive little man with an immense black mustache. He told Banner he had seen Tilfego at the saloon and had known they were back. He said he had word that Dodge wanted to see Banner as soon as Banner returned.

Banner thanked the man, and stood motionless in the doorway after he had left, a warmth flooding him. He knew Dodge's pride. The old man wouldn't send for him unless he was willing to admit he had been wrong. Suddenly Banner shut the door behind him, walking swiftly down to Aztec.

A deep nostalgia filled him with his first sight of the house in which he had spent so many years. The windows made yellow slots against the dark adobe, the recess of the front door lay in black shadow. There was no answer to his knock.

He tried the door. It was not locked, and he opened it, pushing it ajar, stepping into the penetrating reek of Dodge's cigars. But the room seemed

empty. He let his hand slide off the doorknob and took another step inside, calling:

"Henry—?"

There was a faint sound from behind him. He started to wheel. The man came from behind the door and struck him on the back of his head before he was all the way around.

It drove him to his hands and knees. For a moment he swam in the shock of it, barely able to support himself. His arms were grabbed, he was dragged heavily over to the high-backed chair by the fireplace and lifted into it and his arms were twisted around his back and tied. Vision was returning. Arles stood by the front door. He had shut it again. The six-shooter was still clubbed in his hand.

Hackett towered before Banner, black-haired, black-eyed. Joe Garry stood by the ivory table, his hands tucked like horny claws into his sagging shell belt.

Banner leaned his head sickly against the high back of the chair. "Where's Henry? What've you done with Henry—?"

"Don't worry about the old man," Hackett told him. "He's probably on the train by now. Some will to make out in Flagstaff. Ramirez didn't know about it. When I told him Dodge wanted to see you, Ramirez thought it was straight from the horse's mouth."

Banner squinted his eyes against the throbbing pain of his head, glance shuttling to Arles and Garry. "Not using Big Red any more?" he asked thinly.

"Never mind."

"Maybe he got hurt or something."

"I said never mind!" It came sharply from Hackett. "So you think Adakhai saw the murder."

"Do *you?*"

A little flutter of muscle ran across the gaunt angle of Hackett's jaw. "Where is he?"

"I don't know."

Arles moved from the door, reversing his gun.

"I could make him talk," he said.

"Now, listen, Lee," Hackett said. "We understand each other. You know why I want Adakhai."

"To kill him?"

"We'll just get him out of the country till the trial's over."

"Then they'll hang Jahzini. One of them dies either way."

"I'll see that Jahzini isn't hanged."

"Maybe you'll let him escape again so you can put Big Red and Arles in the posse to kill him."

"Damn you, Lee—" Hackett's voice had risen close to a shout—"I didn't have anything to do with that."

"I thought we understood each other."

Hackett was bent toward Banner. His right hand was fisted. Arles was watching with an avid light in his eyes. Finally Hackett slapped his hand savagely against his leg.

"All right. We do understand each other. I'm in this too deep to back out now, Lee. I won't stop at anything to make you talk."

"I think you would have tried to get me killed a long time before this, if you thought you could get away with it," Banner said. "But you'd lose the whole game then, Clay. I've raised too much stink. It would point the finger right at you to get rid of me that way."

"Nobody talked about killing, Lee," Hackett said.

He walked to the ivory-topped table. He opened the cigar box and took out one of the long black smokes. He bit

off its end. Joe Garry lit it for him. Then Hackett came back to Banner, rolling the cigar to make it draw.

"Lee, you've pushed me against the wall and you'll wish to hell you'd kept yourself out of it before I'm through."

"I think Wallace Wright had you against the wall a long time before this."

"You know he did. If they move me south of the railroad again I'm through."

"He was only trying to protect the Indians," Banner said. "If you'd let them alone you would have been all right."

"You know that damn railroad land isn't anything. There isn't enough water on it to keep half my stock alive. The sheep have cut all the grass off." Hackett gestured savagely with the cigar. "It was just a damn sop they threw us hoping we'd knuckle under. But the association had a bill up to open that southern reservation for homesteading. In six months they would have given our land back to us—"

"*Your* land *back* to you?"

Hackett wheeled on him. "Damn rights! Who opened this territory? You wouldn't have a railroad if it wasn't for cattle. You wouldn't even have any town. We build a country for you and you try to take it away from beneath us—"

"Are you trying to convince me, or yourself?"

Hackett stared dourly at Banner. "All right. You just poked a sore and the pus had to come out. I shouldn't have wasted the time on you." He began to draw on the cigar till its end glowed cherry-red. "You know you can't take this, Lee. I guess you've got as much guts as the next man, but you can't stand up under something like this. You'd better tell me now while you've still got your face."

Banner stared at the glowing tip of the cigar. A fear welled up in him—he could not deny it—a fear of pain that came from the animal depths of him. He felt his fingers curling up behind the chair.

"I don't know where Adakhai is," he said.

Hackett drew a breath, a thin little breath. Garry wiped one hand across the dirty belly of his shirt. Arles's boots made a restless scrape against the floor.

"In his eye," he said. "Put it in his eye."

Hackett was looking into Banner's eyes. His glance slowly dropped to Banner's cheek. "Hold his head."

Garry stepped to one side of Banner. The lawyer tried to jerk aside, tried to overturn the chair. Arles jumped forward and stopped that. Garry caught Banner's long yellow hair, jerking his head against the back of the chair. He cupped his other hand under Banner's chin, thumb and forefinger digging deep.

"One more chance, Lee."

"I don't know."

Hackett started to bring the cigar down to Banner's face. Then there was a sound from the rear, the creak of a door, the heavy tattoo of boots on the hard-packed earth of the floor.

"Conchita?" Dodge called. "Why'd you leave all the lights on in front? I thought you was going home early. I got to talking with Prentice and missed that damned train—"

Hackett, Arles, Garry, all three of them wheeled toward the back door as Dodge appeared there. The old lawyer halted.

"What the hell?" he said. Then he began to come across the room in a stiff, stamping walk. "Hackett, what in the johnny-hell are you doing?"

Arles raised his gun. Henry Dodge took a last step, staring at it, then stopped. He lifted his gaze from the weapon to Hackett's face. Then he looked at Banner, holding out his hand helplessly.

"Lee—"

"Get him out of here," Hackett said.

Arles put his gun in his holster to step toward Dodge and grab him, and Garry followed. Dodge swung away from them, fighting wildly. One of his flailing arms caught Arles across the face, knocking him away. Then he wheeled the other way, tearing free of Garry's hands, and lunged at Hackett, his old man's anger flushing his jowls. Hackett tried to jump back. But Dodge caught his arm, clawing at the cigar.

"You can't do this, Clay," he shouted. "Not in my—"

Hackett's blow cut him off, striking the side of his neck and knocking him heavily to his knees. Again Hackett tried to back off and free himself. But Dodge's face was against his stomach, and his clawing hands caught Hackett's belt. Hackett kicked him in the belly.

Banner shouted and lunged up against his bindings. The kick doubled the old man over with a sick cough, and knocked him violently backward. He crashed into the marble-topped table, upsetting it. The Sandwich lamp smashed against the floor, and the smell of raw camphene flooded the room.

In the sudden darkness, Banner writhed savagely to free his hands. He could hear Dodge making sick, retching sounds.

"There's another lamp somewhere by the oven," Hackett said. "Light it up."

There was the stumbling sound of boots, a curse. Finally light blossomed at the other end of the room, revealing Joe Garry bent over the lamp on the *banca*. Banner could feel his wrists bleeding, but he was not free. The overturned table had kept Dodge from being thrown completely flat, and he sat in the wreckage, leaning heavily against it.

"You damned old fool," Hackett said. "If you'd gone to Flagstaff this wouldn't of happened."

"Hackett—" Dodge almost gagged on the words—"what is it, what is it—"

"I guess you'll find out now," Hackett said. "I'm through wasting time."

He put the cigar in his mouth, drawing on it till the tip began to glow again. Dodge cried out and tried to rise. But the effort cost the old man too much. With a low moan of pain he fell back against the table and slid down till he lay flat, one arm thrown across the broken drawer that had fallen out. Hackett took out his cigar and held it in front of Banner's face.

"Tell me where he is, Lee."

Banner stared fixedly at the glowing point of light. The sweat slid down his face. Arles and Garry watched tensely.

"All right, Lee," Hackett said.

"If you do that to my boy, Hackett, I'll shoot your belly out."

It came from Henry Dodge. It checked Hackett. Slowly, he turned to look at Dodge. The old man still lay on his side. But in his hand was the old Dragoon Colt he had always kept in the drawer.

"Back away," he said. "Drop that cigar and back away."

Hackett's face was dead white. His

black eyes were pinpoints of rage. As he started to take a step backward, Arles made a vicious motion to Dodge's right. Dodge turned and fired.

The shot was deafening. The bullet plucked Arles's tall hat off and carried it halfway to the wall before it dropped. Arles stood transfixed, his hand gripped around an undrawn gun.

"Next time it'll be your head," Dodge said.

Arles removed his hand from his gun. Hackett dropped the cigar. Dodge grasped the edge of the overturned table and pulled himself to a sitting position. Banner saw that the heavy gun trembled faintly in his hand.

He picked up a shard of glass from the broken lamp and crawled over behind Banner, still aiming the gun at the men, and began to saw at the ropes. When they dropped off, Banner stood up, rubbing at his wrists. He took the Colt from Dodge's hand. The old lawyer got to his feet with difficulty, worked his way around the chair and lowered himself into it.

"Shall we put them away?" he said. "We've got a dozen counts. Trespassing. Assault and battery—"

"Is that what we want them for?" Banner asked.

Dodge looked up at him. "No. I guess it isn't."

"You'd better go, then," Banner said.

The intense rage was dying in Hackett's face. Without speaking, he walked to the door. He waited till Arles and Garry went out past him. He was looking at Dodge all the time. There was a thin venom in his voice when he spoke.

"They would have called you judge," he said.

"The hell with that," Dodge said. "All I want is my boy back. Touch him again and I'll kill you myself, Clay."

Hackett stared at them a moment longer, then wheeled and walked out.

Banner went to the door, watching the three men walk up Aztec toward Courthouse Square, where they must have left their horses. Finally he turned to Dodge.

"Want me to get the doctor?"

Dodge shook his head. "Nothing broken. I just can't take it like I used to. Maybe a drink."

Banner stuck the gun in his belt and went over to the spindled Mexican cupboard, pouring two glasses of Dodge's wine. The old man took his glass, raised it, holding Banner's eyes.

"Here's to it, son. It should have been a long time ago."

Dodge drank, lowered the glass with a husky exhalation of pleasure. "What did they want, Lee?" he asked.

"They wanted to know where Adakhai was. They think his testimony would convict Arles."

"Then that Indian really did see the murder?"

Banner shook his head, frowning. "I don't know yet. There are still two other possibilities. I don't know whether Hackett is aware of them or not. Kitteridge and Mills are still on my list."

Dodge went over to his leather arm chair, dropping into it. Grimacing, he propped one shoe on his knee, began untying it. Banner saw the pain the effort caused him and went over and knelt before the old man, finishing with the laces, pulling the shoe off. Dodge leaned back with a pleased sigh.

"Thanks," he said. "Ain't had anybody to do that in a long while." There was a brooding expression in Dodge's eyes. "You were right, weren't you?" he said. "I'm getting old. And when a

man gets old, he gets afraid. He's worked so hard. Wanted something so bad. He sees it just within his grasp. Knows it's his last chance—"

"Please, Henry." Banner pulled off the other shoe. "You don't have to, I understand how it was."

"Yes, I have to," the old man said. "I'm glad you wanted to be a lawyer so bad, Lee. You can appreciate how I felt about that judgeship. All my life I'd wanted that spot on the bench. I guess I'd begun compromising for it a long time ago. Letting Hackett become one of my biggest backers was a compromise. He was starting to trade pretty sharp even then. I told myself it was politics." He shook his leonine head. "But I just couldn't believe he'd kill."

"A man will do a lot of things when he's desperate," Banner said. "Do you think he'll try to get Arles out of the country?"

"Wouldn't do him any good, if you've got an eyewitness." He shook his head. "It's a crazy stalemate when a murderer can walk right in your house and you can't do a thing to him. I guess they're just as blocked, though. Hackett can't move till he's sure if we have the eyewitness. What can I do, Lee?"

Banner was still on his knees, and his face raised to Dodge. Slowly, a grin spread his lips, and he clutched the old man's knee. "I know we can lick 'em now," he said. "Wasn't the district attorney at Denver an old schoolmate of yours?"

"D. H. Pine. We almost got expelled for writing a parody on Blackstone."

"You can help then, Henry," Banner said. He went on to tell him how Kitteridge was really Victor Morrow, of the Morrow-Ware swindle. He told how Julia had known Kitteridge up there and was convinced of his innocence. "I guess you'll remember, Shefford was the bookkeeper. He must have planned to get off clean with Ware, but something slipped up. Julia thinks he made two sets of books, though. The real ones, which never appeared, and the falsified ones, which proved Morrow guilty."

"Why would the real ones never turn up?"

"Shefford planned to use them against Ware, in case Ware didn't come through with his share of the money."

The old man nodded. "Been done before. Shefford's term's almost up now. If Julia's right, he'll be waiting to get out and force Ware to come across."

"Do you think there's an angle?"

"If it's set up the way Julia claims, here's what I think. Pine being a friend, I followed that case closely. Ware got off clean, but the papers had a lot about what a high-liver he was, a big spender. It's been close to five years now. I'd bet a box of my best cigars Ware hasn't got any of that money left. If we could prove to Shefford that Ware was broke, Shefford wouldn't have any reason for holding those books out. He'd surely be willing to turn state's evidence to get the rest of his sentence knocked off."

"Julia said Ware and his wife were separated. She was living in Kansas somewhere."

"I did a chore for the Pinkerton division manager in Kansas once. He'd find her for me if she was there."

"And she'd certainly know if Ware had spent that money. Do you think Shefford would believe her?"

"She might even have proof. And if she doesn't, I'll get it."

Banner walked moodily to the fireplace. "We're talking as if we had all

the facts. The whole thing's supposition. How do we know Julia's right? Maybe Kitteridge is guilty. Maybe I'm just going off half-cocked like I always did, Henry. I don't want to suck you into something foolish again—"

"Don't talk nonsense." Dodge got up out of the chair and padded over behind him, clapping him on the shoulder. "It takes somebody like you to get anything done. If Kitteridge is your witness, we'll find out. We'll damn well find out!"

Chapter Nineteen

Run or Fight

NOW it was August, with the thunderclouds banked in threatening tiers along the horizon, spilling their rain on the land almost daily, tainting the mornings with the pungent scent of dampened greasewood. Dodge had gotten leave of absence from Prentice to go north, since Jahzini's trial was not set for several weeks yet, and Banner was left to handle the myriad details of the old man's private practice.

There were wills to change, a theft case before a justice of the peace, a brief to draw up on an inheritance contract. Banner kept the office open in the morning to receive those of Dodge's clients who still had enough trust in the old man to come.

But through it all, Banner did not forget his primary allegiance to Jahzini. And the second day after Dodge's departure, he rode out to the homestead of Jeremiah Mills.

When he reached the cut-off to Yellow Gap and gained the higher ground he saw the two riders on the Ganado Road behind him. Wariness squinting his eyes, he rode into the cover of twisted juniper and watched. As they approached the fork in the road, he saw the Broken Bit brand on the near horse. It was Joe Garry in the saddle. The man with him was Breed.

They passed the cut-off and rode on down the Ganado Road in the direction of Hackett's outfit. Only when they were out of sight did Banner turn on north.

Mills's land was on Puffwillow Creek, five miles from the Gap. It was crisscrossed with the crumbled remains of canals built by the ancient peoples who had been here before the Indians, and Mills had dug out sections of these ditches leading from the creek to his alfalfa acreage. Banner followed the winding wagon road through canals filled to the brim with the recent rains till he found the farmer on high ground near the creek, jamming a crude headgate back into place in his brush-and-timber dam. The man straightened with sight of Banner.

"Afternoon, Mills," Banner said.

The man looked up at Banner, eyes squinted against the sun. Then he turned to walk heavily down the bank of the canal toward his house. Banner gigged his horse after the man, catching up with him.

"Looks like this rain is going to pull your crop through."

For a space, Banner thought the man would not answer this either. But he was too much a farmer to remain silent on that subject. He spat into the canal.

"Thought I'd make me some money on it this year, but I can't find a cattleman who needs it."

"Not when they can graze on Indian

pastures free."

Mills turned to glare at Banner. "If you come up here to make trouble, you might as well ride on."

"I just thought I'd tell you that I saw Kitteridge," Banner said. "He says he gave you that bay before the murder."

This stopped the man. He wheeled to Banner, anger swelling his chest, lifting his whole body for a moment. Then he clamped his lips together, wheeled, and walked on toward his house. Banner saw that his wife had come to the door. Clara Mills was as stooped, as gaunt as her husband.

"Baby's cryin' again, Jeremiah," she said, tugging the towcloth wrapper listlessly around her shoulders. "Can't you git the doctor?"

"What with?" Mills said irritably. "He won't take no more alfalfa for pay."

"I'll get the doctor," Banner said, "if you'll tell me what you saw at Yellow Gap that day."

At the door, Mills wheeled back again. Before he could speak, Joe Garry stepped around the corner of the house. He had a six-shooter in his hand.

"Just sit still, Banner," he said. "Breed's behind you with a gun."

Banner turned involuntarily to see the half-breed walking from the cover of ragged willows that topped the high creekbank. He held an old fifteen-shot Henry across one hip.

Garry stopped in front of Mills. "Where's the Indian?" he asked. "We been waiting for this. Where's Adakhai?"

Mills stared blankly at him. "What are you talkin' about?"

"You know. That's what Banner's here for. Get aside and let us through. We'll find him ourselves."

"Don't let 'em in, Jeremiah," Clara said, from behind her husband. "They ain't got no right."

Breed walked up by the wall of the house, still holding his rifle pointed at Banner. "Maybe you like some cattle they stampede through the alfalfa," he said.

A squinted look drew Mills's eyes almost closed. "You wouldn't do that. I couldn't stay here without that crop."

"Then let us in, damn you," Garry said.

Mills turned aside slowly, staring at Garry. Breed was next to the door now, with the rifle. Garry passed between him and Mills, to go in. But Clara barred the way, her eyes glowing with anger.

"You can't go in there. My baby's sick—"

With a curse, Garry whipped his gun across her face. She reeled back with a sick gasp of pain.

"Garry!"

It came from Mills like the roar of some animal in pain. The man tried to wheel back and meet it, but Mills struck him with an echoing crack of bone on bone. It smashed the short man back into Breed, as Breed tried to swing his rifle around. Before either man could recover, Mills lunged into them, hitting Garry again, an awesome blow that knocked him free of Breed and carried him up against the house so hard the whole building shuddered.

It had given Banner time to pull his gun. As Breed staggered free, swinging his rifle up, Banner called his name. The man checked his whole motion, knowing what it meant, becoming rigid as a statue, with his rifle still pointed at the ground.

Mills had jumped after Garry, catch-

ing him against the wall before he could fall, hitting him again. It doubled Garry over. Clara staggered from the door, one hand to her bleeding face, and caught her husband's arm before he could strike again.

"Jeremiah," she begged, putting her whole weight on him, "you'll kill him, you'll kill him."

For a space of time Banner couldn't measure, Mills held Joe Garry against the wall, slack as a sack of wheat. The farmer was breathing thickly. At last he released Garry, and stepped back. The man slid down the wall to a sitting position, chin sunk on his chest, face viscid with blood. Mills stared stupidly at him, then at his wife. She was looking up into his face, with a shining look in her eyes.

The kids had clustered in the doorway now, elfin little figures in their tattered clothes. There was a barefoot girl with tousled hair the color of corn, maybe three years old, and a boy about her same age, round-eyed, open-mouthed. There was an older boy, maybe ten, the first one to gain the courage to move out of the door, his eyes wide and awe-struck.

"Gosh, Pa," he whispered.

Mills looked around at him. The blank rage was gone from the farmer's eyes now. A realization of what he had done deepened the seams around his mouth. His shoulders began to sink.

"Put the rifle down, Breed," Banner said.

The hatchet-faced man dropped the Henry on the ground. Garry lifted his head, groaning with pain. He tried to straighten, wiped feebly at the blood and dirt on his face. Banner jerked his gun at Breed, and the man went over to help Garry get up.

Once on his feet, Garry sagged heavily against the wall. At last, he moved away from the wall, swaying heavily. His voice shook when he spoke to Mills.

"You won't be on this land tomorrow," he said.

Mills held out his hand, started to speak, but Garry turned away. He looked savagely at Banner, then stumbled by him, toward the willows, where they had probably left their horses. Breed glanced at his rifle on the ground.

"Leave it there," Banner said.

Venom filled the man's face, but he followed Garry. Mills watched them go, then turned dead eyes to his wife.

"You better start packing."

She caught his arm. "No, Jeremiah—"

"You know what Hackett will do now. They'll trample the alfalfa, they'll burn us out. If we're here they'll just as soon shoot us as not."

All the life seemed drained from his face as he shambled into the house. The kids scurried from his path, round-eyed and frightened. Soundless tears formed silvery tracks in Clara's worn face.

"Did you see him when he hit Garry?" she asked.

"I saw him," Banner said gently.

"That's what he used to be," she said.

"If it isn't completely dead in him, maybe we could give it back to him," Banner said. "Was Jeremiah really here all that day of the murder?"

She locked her hands together and looked down at them.

"It would save Jahzini's life, wouldn't it?"

"Yes."

Her eyes squinted shut, she shook her bowed head. "No. Jeremiah wasn't here all day. He went into town."

"Did he ride the bay he got from Kitteridge?"

"I can't remember that." She looked up, a plea in her face. "I really can't—"

"I believe you," he said. He frowned at her a moment. "What if we put Hackett in such a position that he couldn't touch you?" he asked. "Does your husband still have enough guts left to be worth saving?"

She reached up and caught the lapels of his coat, voice fierce. "Of course he has. You saw what he could do—"

He gently removed her hands from his lapels, and went around her into the house. Mills had thrown the tattered blankets off a bed and was rolling up the straw tick.

"Mills," Banner said. "In my saddlebags is a statement signed by Caleb Elder. It proves beyond doubt that Hackett is using reservation land for his cattle. If I turn this statement over to the railroad, they'll revoke Hackett's lease. It would finish him north of the tracks."

"Then why don't you do it?"

"Because that still wouldn't pin the murder on Arles. What we can do is hold Elder's statement over Hackett's head. He won't dare touch you—"

"Don't try to swindle me into another deal," Mills said bitterly. "I ain't gettin' my kids burnt out again." He glanced bitterly at the children. "There used to be five of 'em."

Clara had come in to stand beside the baby's crib. "It was the Johnson County War. The cattlemen were driving out the nesters. Jimmie got caught under a rafter when it burned through and fell. Jeremiah tried to save him. He couldn't."

Banner moistened his lips, then forced himself to go on. "That won't happen again. I know Hackett and I know what he wants up here. He couldn't stand to lose those railroad leases. They're his foothold north of the tracks. If you quit now you'll be running all the rest of your life."

"He's right, Jeremiah." Clara spoke in a pinched voice. "Where will we go? What will we do? We haven't got a cent."

The man shook his bowed head stubbornly. "No—no—"

"Are you running for their sakes, or yours?" Banner asked. "Why don't you ask your kids what they think? What will they remember? A man that was always running, a man that never had the guts to stay and fight for what he's won. Ask them, Mills. Look at them."

For a long time, Mills refused to turn. But the three children by the door had their eyes fixed solemnly upon him. The baby began to whimper. As if moved by a force outside himself, Mills finally turned. The older boy tried to meet his father's eyes. He lowered his glance. Banner saw it bring the flush of deep shame to Mills's face.

"Is that what you want them to remember?" Banner said.

Mills was breathing shallowly. His fists were clenched and his face was dull red in the gloom.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

It was a long ride to Hackett's, down through Yellow Gap, eastward along the Ganado Road, across the brackish waters of the Rio Puerco. Finally they reached the sprawling adobe *hacienda* Hackett had bought from a Mexican in the early years, on the high bluffs overlooking the river. Lights winked out of the darkness, the dogs began to bay.

Shadowy figures began moving from the open bunkhouse door. Adakhai had

won Banner's own Winchester and six-shooter, and Banner was using the old Dragoon Colt Dodge had kept in the ivory table, and one of Dodge's Winchesters. He bent to pull the .30-.30 from its boot and laid it across his pommel. Mills did the same.

Then the front door was flung open, and Clay Hackett's swaggering broad-shouldered body was silhouetted in its lighted rectangle. "Who is it, Red?" he asked loudly.

Banner saw the shadowy figure of Big Red halt near the steps, towering above the others, and he rode boldly up to them, rifle pointed at the redhead's chest.

"It's Lee Banner, Hackett," he said. "I've got my gun on Red. If anybody starts anything he'll get it first. And Mills can shoot you out of that door just as quick."

There was a general stir among the loosely grouped men. Banner felt his fingers close tightly around the Winchester. But none of them tried to change his position. Banner could see Big Red staring up at him in sullen anger. The man's right arm was in a sling.

"What's on your mind, Lee?" Hackett's voice was sardonic.

"I want to read you a paper." Banner fished Elder's statement from his pocket. The light was hardly enough to read by, but he almost knew it by heart, now. When he finished, he looked up at Hackett.

"I guess you know what would happen if the railroad got hold of this, Clay. It proves beyond a doubt that you're grazing on reservation land. The last thing in the world the railroad wants is trouble with the Indians. That's why they put that clause in all their leases that any rancher grazing beyond the limits of the checkerboard sections would automatically revoke his lease. Once the thing got started it would snowball. A dozen witnesses could be found who had seen your cattle up there. You know what it can do to you?"

Hackett's voice was guttural with restrained anger. "Why show it to me?"

"Because you're going to leave Mills alone. You're not going to touch him, or go near his house again. If you do, if so much as one of your men does, this goes to the railroad."

Garry's voice rose angrily from the group. "Don't let him bluff you, Hackett. I told you Mills is in with Banner. He knows where that Indian is too. We ought to burn him out tonight."

"It's no bluff, Clay, and you know it," Banner said. "You're going to leave Mills alone. I want an understanding on it before I leave."

Hackett walked across the porch to one of the poles supporting its overhang. Banner could not see his face. It seemed a long time before he spoke.

"All right, damn you," he said at last. "You've got your understanding."

He wheeled around and walked inside, slamming the door after him. Banner jerked his gun at Big Red.

"Walk ahead of us down the road."

Nothing happened on the way out. They could hear the stirring of men, their restless talk, but nothing happened. When they were beyond the fences, Banner released Red. The man stepped to the side of road, letting them pass.

They rode silently back to the Yellow Gap cut-off. Here Mills reined up, sitting heavily in his saddle, shaking his head.

"I never thought you could do it—

face Hackett on his own ground that way. Do you think he realizes that you know Arles killed Wright?"

"He knows I know," Banner said. "Does that prove the power of Elder's statement?"

"Won't Hackett try to get it?"

"He may. But he's smart enough to realize I won't carry it around on me. And he's got more important things to get."

"You mean Adakhai?"

Banner leaned toward the man. "Mills, it's either that Indian or Kitteridge or you. Now tell me. Did you see that murder?"

Mills shook his head. "No," he said. "I didn't. I swear I didn't."

Banner shook his head disgustedly. "Tonight didn't mean a thing to you. You're still afraid."

"Who wouldn't be, damn you?" It came from the man in a subdued anger. "Whoever saw the killing would have to testify in court, wouldn't he? With Hackett's killers just waiting to cut him down—"

"Then you did see the killing!"

"Damn you, I didn't! How many times do I have to say it? I'm just telling you, that's all. You're asking too much of a man. Any man. Admitting he was the eyewitness would be signing his own death warrant. And letting his family in on it too, probably."

Banner's eyes grew empty in defeat. "Forget it," he said. "What about now? You're at the crossroads, Mills. Are you going to leave, or stick it out?"

Still stooped in the saddle, Mills gazed down the road. Then his shoulders seemed to lift a little, and he swung in the saddle, looking up toward Yellow Gap.

"I guess I'll be going back to my place," he said.

Chapter Twenty

"You Can Stop Hiding!"

AFTER that it was the waiting. Through Cristina, Banner heard that Adakhai was healing satisfactorily and would soon return to his people at Chin Lee. The young lawyer had the feeling that he had done all he could with Adakhai, and Kitteridge, and Mills, and that now all he could do was wait.

August passed, and the time set for the trial drew near. There had been no word from Dodge, but that was his way. Banner knew he would write when he had something definite. Over a week after Banner had ridden with Mills to Hackett's, Clara Mills came into town. He was in the office when someone knocked. Clara entered when he opened the door. After a first shy greeting, she told him eagerly:

"First time I been in town since that day. Jeremiah's working in the alfalfa. I got some shopping to do, but I just had to see you before anything, Lee. I just had to thank you for everything you done."

"Hackett hasn't showed up, then?"

"Not a sign. And Jeremiah's got a buyer for the alfalfa. It's all because of you, Lee. We can't thank you enough. You should see how much Jeremiah's changed already. I wouldn't believe it. He's carryin' on like he did ten years ago. More alfalfa in that south forty, a new room on the house—"

He smiled. "That stoop gone from his shoulders?"

She caught his hand. "A lot of it has. Every new day takes some more out.

Every new day makes him realize a little more that he can stand up to Hackett now, that he hasn't anything to fear, if he'll only stick. Lee, I been tryin' to make him see how he's got to tell if he saw Wright killed. Sooner or later he'll come up to taw. If there's anything to tell, he'll tell." Her voice grew grim. "I'll see to that."

"You give me new hope, Clara," he said.

She pulled her wrapper around bony shoulders. "I got to get on with my shoppin'."

"I'll see you downstairs."

He put his coat on and walked with her to the sidewalk. She took her leave and he stood there on the corner, reluctant to return to the confinement of the office. Sam Price's boy came running down the street. He came up to Banner, holding out an envelope.

"Si said you'd give me a dime for this. Just came in on the telegraph."

Banner found ten cents for the boy, ripped open the envelope with a sudden excitement.

DENVER, COLORADO
AUGUST 24, 1891

TO LEE BANNER
GOT LINE ON WARE'S EX WIFE. SHE HAD LETTERS FROM WARE PROVING HE HAD SPENT ALL THE MONEY. SHEFFORD BROKE WHEN HE SAW THEM. TOLD US WHERE TO FIND THE REAL BOOKS AND TURNED STATE'S EVIDENCE AGAINST WARE FOR LENIENCY. BOOKS PROVED MORROW'S INNOCENCE. PINE GETTING INDICTMENT QUASHED AGAINST MORROW. DON'T NEGLECT YOUR BLACKSTONE.

UNCLE HENRY.

Banner realized his hands were trembling. Stuffing the telegram in his pocket, he went to the hitchrack, knocked the reins loose, threw them over his horse's head, and swung aboard. He wheeled the animal around and put it into a gallop down Reservation. Before he reached Yellow Gap, however, he realized he could not go to Kitteridge alone. It was Julia's right to be along when he delivered this. It might help resolve things more quickly.

So he went on to the school. It was past noon when the buildings rose over the flat horizon. He passed the trading-post and saw a dusty horse standing hipshot before the agency living-quarters. It puzzled him but he trotted on to the school building. In the long room, a score of Navaho children were sitting in orderly fashion at the crude desks.

"Where is your teacher?" Banner asked.

One of the older boys stood up, not looking at Banner, reciting it like a catechism: "White man he come to house by horseback at a trot. Teacher-woman she go walking fast to see him. Tell us our lessons to do until she come back walking."

Going back to the living-quarters, Banner saw that the ratty bay by the door had Kitteridge's Flying Bar brand. He hesitated before knocking, oddly reluctant to see Julia and the man together again. Then he put his knuckles to the door.

Julia answered. Her full lower lip was stiff with tension, and anger made kindling lights in her great dark eyes. Banner saw Kitteridge sitting on the couch within the gloom of the room, smoking a cigarette. With sight of Banner, the man rose slowly.

"Well, counselor, come after some more horses?"

Banner found all the eagerness swept from him. He glanced at Julia, wordlessly pulled the telegram from his pocket. He saw the flush leave her cheeks as she stared at it. Then she stepped back to let him in. He walked over and handed the telegram to Kitteridge. Kitteridge read it with narrowed eyes, his lips pressing tighter and tighter. When he had finished he crumpled the telegram in one fist, viciously, and turned burning eyes to Banner.

"What kind of a fool do you take me for?"

Banner's lips parted in surprise. "You know Dodge wouldn't send anything like that unless it were true."

"The hell I do." Kitteridge flung the crumpled telegram from him. "You damn shysters! Rigging up something like this. Did you think this would make me tell if I saw anything at Yellow Gap? Do you think I'm a complete fool?"

He wheeled and stalked to the end of the room. He took a last draw on his cigarette. It made a savage, sucking sound in the room. Then he flung it down.

In the meantime, Julia had picked up the telegram and read it. She went over behind Kitteridge. "This must be true, Vic. I know Dodge went up to Denver. He wouldn't say this unless it was so. You know that. His worst enemies would take his word on anything. You are free, Vic."

It seemed as if he would never turn around to face her. At last, however, he wheeled. There was a hollow-eyed expression on his face. All the sardonic mockery, the impenetrable cynicism was emptied from his eyes. He stared at Julia, and then walked across the room and sat down on the couch again, looking blankly at the wall.

"Free?" he said.

"Free as any man," Banner said. "You can stop hiding up there in the hills. You can make friends. You can come down out of your hole—"

"And tell you that I saw who really killed Wright." The thin edge was back in Kitteridge's voice.

"That's what kept you from telling, wasn't it?" Banner asked. "The fear that your true identity would be found out if you got mixed up with the law."

"Yes, counselor. It was."

"Vic," Julia said sharply. "Don't go back to that. Can't you see how much Banner and Dodge have gone through for you? And then you act like this."

"For me?" he asked cynically.

"All right. So they had their reasons. What's the difference? They've given you back something you could never have gotten alone in a million years—"

"Slack off, will you?" Kitteridge bent his head, running rope-scarred fingers through his thinning hair. "How can I trust them? I've been framed once, by my best friend. How can I trust anybody after that?"

"Vic," Julia said. "It's not a frame-up. You can take my word on it."

"Your word!" He wheeled on her, bitter-eyed. "Why should I take your word? How did Banner know who I really was in the first place? You're the only one who could have told him. I might as well put you in the same boat as Ware!"

"Vic, don't be like that." She went to him, tried to grab his arm. "Maybe I told, but I knew they only wanted to help you—"

"How did you know?" He tore loose, pacing back toward the couch. "I'm

not going to be caught short again, Julia! I've put in five years of hell because I trusted someone I'd known since I was a kid. I'm not going to be jammed in a corner again, understand?" He wheeled on them, almost shouting it. "Understand?"

They both stared at him, neither answering. Banner's face grew dark and somber.

"It would take courage to testify against Arles," he said. "Maybe I made a mistake. I thought that indictment was the only thing that kept you from telling what you knew."

For a moment, Kitteridge's eyes were blank with anger. Then he masked it off with his sardonic cynicism.

"Maybe you did," he said. "Maybe you made a mistake about everything. *Ipso facto*, counselor?"

He picked up his hat off the couch and walked out.

Julia went halfway to the door after him, and then stopped, helplessness in her face. Banner did not move. His first anger was gone, leaving only hollow defeat. Julia turned toward him. She was biting at her underlip, her heavy breathing swelled her breasts.

"I thought I knew him. Even the way he'd changed, I thought I knew what he was really like underneath. But—now—"

He shook his head in deep discouragement. "I've run into the same thing with Mills, Julia. Maybe we expect them to change too soon. It's been five years for Kitteridge, now. A man can't switch back in a minute. You could see the shock it was."

She came to him. She reached up to touch his cheek with the tips of her fingers. Her voice was low, throaty.

"I wish—"

He waited for her to go on. When she didn't, he asked softly, "You wish what, Julia?"

She stared at him with a luminous darkness in her eyes. Then she wheeled and walked over to the couch, facing away from him.

"Nothing," she said.

He studied the bowed line of her shoulders, sharing her helplessness. "I guess I'll be going," he said.

Chapter Twenty-One

The Trial Begins

HENRY DODGE got back on September the eighth with a letter to Kitteridge from the Denver district attorney, and one from the foreman of the grand jury, and a half-dozen Denver newspapers headlining the story of Morrow's innocence and of Ware's arrest in New Orleans. They had printed a picture of Morrow as he had been five years ago, and Banner could understand how Julia had loved him. The thinning hair Banner knew was a handsome black mane, the cynical sun-faded eyes were bold and laughing.

Dodge and Banner rode up to Kitteridge's together with the newspapers and the letters. But the house was empty, and the horses were all gone. Banner got Tilfego to hunt for him, giving the Mexican the newspapers and letters in case he found Kitteridge. It took Tilfego three days. He returned with the news that he had come across the man with his cattle on the north fork of the Corn. Apparently the man was not running away, but the newspapers, the letters, made no appreciable change in him. It left Banner with

nothing but a deep discouragement, as the day of the trial arrived.

It was the twelfth, and Jahzini was to get in from Yuma that morning. Banner and Dodge had an early breakfast and walked up Aztec to the courthouse. The streets were already teeming with life. A crowd of prospective jurors was talking and smoking restlessly on the courthouse steps, more men were gathered in little groups along the picket fence. Banner could not help looking eastward, toward the desert. Dodge stopped beside him, lighting a cigar.

"Which one are you looking for, son?"

Banner shook his head helplessly. "I don't know. Maybe I've been a fool, Henry. Maybe none of those men saw it—"

Dodge cut him off, grasping his arm. "There's still time, Lee. I don't think any one of those three men is the kind to let a man die, with what you've done for them."

Banner hardly heard him. He seemed to be standing in a void, staring down that street. He could feel Dodge's hand tighten on his arm.

"Who is it?" the old man asked. "My eyes ain't as good as they used to be."

"I can't see yet. One rider, leading an empty horse."

Every man in the crowd had seen it, now. The silence was an eerie thing, gathering weight, exerting pressure. Then Banner felt the tension washed out of him on a husky breath.

"Who is it, son?" Dodge asked.

Banner's voice had a dead sound. "Cristina."

Sound began to stir again, like the rustling of autumn leaves in a wind. Cristina was a block away now, riding down the center of the street. She had a silver comb in her black hair. She wore her best blue velvet blouse and skirts of black wool.

Then Caleb Elder's voice rose mockingly from the crowd behind Banner. "Hear you've taken the Injun-lover back in your office, Henry. Is this the squaw you're goin' to hitch up with now?"

A jeering laugh rose from other men, and Banner could not help wheeling savagely toward them. Dodge caught his arm.

"Put some slack in it, son. You're going to get a lot of that from here on in."

Banner slowly wheeled back till he was facing Cristina again. She rode up to them and reined in and stepped off. Her eyes were black and depthless with anger.

"Never mind them," Banner told her gently. "They don't count."

"I didn't even hear them," she said stiffly. "I was told my father would be in on the ten-fifteen."

"We were just going to meet him—" Banner trailed off, frowning. His attention had been so fixed to her that he had not realized what horse she led. It was his own chestnut, saddled and bridled. She handed him the lead rope.

"Adakhai came past my *hogan* by wagon last night. He left this gift for you."

Eyes filled with wonder, he stepped over to the chestnut. The horse nickered and tried to nuzzle him. He could not help chuckling.

"It's hard to believe Adakhai would do this. He won it gambling. You know too well how they feel about that."

"It is what gives it so much meaning," she said. "He told me he wanted to see you again. He said his *hogan* is

your *hogan* whenever you come to Chin Lee. It is something I never would have believed."

Banner held out his hand. "If he'd do this—"

His voice died as he saw the darkening of her eyes. "He did not tell me whether he saw the murder at Yellow Gap."

The eagerness fled Banner's face, leaving it somber, older. She came close, caught his arm.

"Perhaps he must think it over longer. If anyone could give him reason to tell, you did. You did more with him than I thought possible for any white man to do. How did you do it, Lee? It couldn't have been merely that you saved his life."

He shook his head. "It was a lot of things, I guess. I think the gambling must have been part of it. Did he tell you about the *bizha?*"

"Yes. He said you knew such great defeat that you put your cards face down on the floor and surrendered completely."

"I'm still wondering if I did right," he murmured. "I know how much that *bizha* meant to him. I thought that if I could win it, he would do almost anything to get it back, even tell me if he was at Yellow Gap—"

"No!" She broke in angrily, shaking her head. "Its only value is in the power it gives him in gambling. Of what value would it be if he lost it that way? He could not bargain for it. You would have gained his undying hatred. How could you misjudge him so?"

"That hand I put face down was a full house," Banner said. "He was so excited at winning that he didn't question it. He only had two pairs."

"Lee." Her voice had a breathless sound. "You could have won."

He nodded soberly. "I realized in the last moment what a great mistake it would be."

Her lips were parted and she was staring into his face as if seeing something there for the first time. "I have been wrong," she said. "It is I who have misjudged you. Only a man who understood us could have realized that. No wonder you could change Adakhai so."

"Are you thinking," he asked gently, "that perhaps there isn't a thousand years between us, after all?"

For a moment longer she stared up into his face. Then she turned away, toward her horse, as she had when he had kissed her out there on the desert. When she finally spoke, her voice was so low he could hardly hear it.

"Perhaps I am like Adakhai," she said. "Perhaps I too must think it over."

Banner stood looking at her back, wanting to do something, to say something, he didn't know exactly what, yet held from anything by the watching men. Finally Dodge cleared his throat.

"We better get up to the station."

Banner took the reins of his horse and Cristina turned and moved up beside him and they walked together down the street, running the gamut of veiled comments, of curious stares, of open insults. In front of Price's Mercantile was a growing crowd of Indians, sitting stolidly on the curb or squatting in the shade against the wall. The ruddy mahogany of their faces, the bright silver of their jewelry, the vivid blues and reds of their blankets made a barbaric splash of color against the earth-colored buildings.

"Didn't know Jahzini's clan was so

big," Dodge muttered.

"They are not all my people," Cristina said. "A Mountain Chant is being held east of Yellow Gap to cure a man who dreamed of bear. Many of these people came south by wagon to attend the ceremonies. That is why Adakhai came."

"And the only reason," Banner said bitterly.

Cristina's chin lifted. "I have faith that Adakhai will not let my father die. I saw how you changed him, Lee. If he is the one who can save Jahzini, he will come."

The train was half an hour late, and there was little time for greetings when it finally arrived. Sheriff Drake and three deputies hustled the old Indian through the crowds to the courthouse. Banner saw Arles and Big Red lounging beneath the facade of Blackstrap Kelly's, drinking beer. Red's arm was no longer in a sling but a dirty bandage still showed beneath his cuff. As Banner climbed the steps to the courthouse porch, he could not help turning to look over the heads of the crowd, down Reservation, toward the desert. He heard Hackett's brittle voice.

"You really don't expect anybody to come in, do you?"

Banner wheeled sharply to meet the man's black eyes. The biting mockery in them made him lean forward. "Hackett—"

"Yes, Lee?" The man's humorless smile grew broader.

Banner settled back, forced himself to turn toward the door. Dodge put a hand on his shoulder.

"Good boy," he muttered. "Just hang on tight."

By the time they reached the rail, they saw that Jahzini had been seated at the defendant's table with Cristina. She had brought him some paper bread she'd made the day before, blue as turquoise from the cedar ashes baked into it, and the old man was grinning like a kid at a picnic as he munched at it. Prentice soon came from his chambers, and the bailiff opened court. The first juryman was called.

He was James Wentworth, who ran the feed barn on Aztec, and who did a lot of business with Hackett. It was highly possible that he was under Hackett's thumb, and would constitute a threat to Jahzini, if he got on the jury. Dodge tried to establish this fact, without success, and finally turned the challenging over to Banner. Banner stepped up to the jury box.

"James Wentworth, isn't it true that on June the twelfth of 1889 you had a quarrel with the defendant?"

"I—I don't quite recall."

"He was going home drunk and ran into your barn, knocking off a door. You threatened to take your shotgun to him if he ever came down that street again?"

"That isn't true—I—"

"You're under oath, Wentworth. I have signed depositions from two witnesses to the incident. Shall I have them subpoenaed?"

"No, but I—"

"I submit that this man be rejected for prejudice he might have against the defendant."

Judge Prentice waited for Wentworth to protest. When the man did not, he nodded frostily. "Sustained."

"Step down," the constable intoned.

The next man was called. He could not be proven prejudiced, and was accepted. The third man was Seth Masters, a small cattleman who had lived off Hackett's bounty for years.

"Seth Masters, isn't it true that your father was scalped by Indians?"

"Damn right."

"Isn't it true that on a dozen occasions you've been heard to say that the best Indian was a dead Indian?"

"I never said exactly—"

"You're under oath, Masters."

"Well—"

"I have witnesses to these instances, your honor. I submit that Seth Masters be rejected as unfit for prejudice he might have against Jahzini as an Indian."

"I don't think the witnesses are necessary, Mr. Banner. You may step down, Mr. Masters."

When court was recessed for lunch, only three jurymen had been chosen. Dodge met Banner at the gate, grinning broadly.

"I never seen anybody hang it up like this. How'd you ever dig up so much dirt about this town?"

"I've been going through your old briefs for the last three weeks. You've got fifteen years of testimony in there, Henry. It's like the whole history of this town. If Jahzini isn't going to have an eyewitness, he's going to have a fair jury."

As they pushed their way through the sweating, clamoring crowd to the door, Banner saw Julia standing behind the last row of seats. He elbowed his way quickly to her.

"Have you seen him?" he asked. "Has he come?"

She shook her head. "I waited at my place till the last minute. I thought he might—" She shook her head. "I haven't seen him since that day. I'm beginning to wonder if you weren't right. Maybe he just doesn't have the courage."

"Now, Julia—"

"It's true, Lee. Remember what you said, about Victor still standing between us, about me not even realizing it? I thought that telegram would answer it for me, would bring him back to what he used to be, and I'd know. But now it's even worse. Someone who doesn't even have the backbone to speak up in something like this, who would let an innocent old man die! How could I love a man like that?"

He patted her helplessly on the shoulder, lips compressed, unable to say anything that might help her now. He finally left her and went bleakly out through the crowd. He could not help turning down Reservation, staring out toward the desert again. At last he became aware of Tilfego, pushing his yawning buckskin through the thinning knots of people. The man reined in beside him.

"Which one you look for, Lee?"

Banner shook his head helplessly. "I've almost given up, Tilfego. If one of them was going to come, he'd surely do it by now."

"I been wait out in those hills by the Yellow Gap cut-off, like you ask. Nobody he come down from the north. But something is happen I think you should know. Breed and Joe Garry they are waiting there too."

"That's one of the things I was afraid of," Banner said. "I'm helpless. I should be out there too, but I've got to see that Jahzini gets a decent jury." He looked up at Tilfego. "Will you go back? Don't take any chances. If our eyewitness comes, warn him before Breed and Garry can get to him. Will do?"

The man grinned broadly. "Will do."

Banner watched him thread his way back through the crowd, then hunted up Ramirez, the husband of Dodge's

cook, and asked him to mingle with the crowd at Kelly's and keep an eye on Arles and Hackett's other men. If any of them left town he was to tell Banner immediately. Then Banner returned to the court.

Though all the windows had been opened, the room was still oppressively hot. Most of the crowd had removed their coats and were shrugging irritably at shirts turned clammy by perspiration. Wiping at his red face, the bailiff reopened court, and the choosing of the jury went on.

By four o'clock Banner's voice was husky from the constant questioning, his back ached, he had a throbbing headache from the heat. He had just finished questioning a juror and had returned to the table when he saw Ramirez beckoning him from the gate. He went to the rail and the man whispered in his ear.

"Joe Garry he come into Kelly's, talk with Arles and Big Red. Then all three they get Hackett and ride out of town."

Banner turned back to the table, sick with the implications of it. Then, swiftly, he slid into the bench beside Cristina, whispering in her ear.

"Tell your father he's got to pass out. Something's come up and I've got to get out of here. Tell him he's got to faint."

She frowned intensely, then whispered to her father. Banner saw the old man's face go blank with surprise. Then he grinned mischievously at Banner.

"*Shiye*," he said, in a chiding way. "My son."

For a moment Banner thought he did not understand. Irritably he bent to whisper in Cristina's ear again. Before he could speak, Jahzini's head lolled back and he slid out of the seat to fall limply on the floor. There was an immediate stir in the courtroom, the bailiff ran over to squat beside the old man, Prentice began pounding with his gavel. Banner stood up, shouting to be heard over the babble of voices.

"Your honor, I request that the court adjourn for the day. The strain has been too much for my client. He could not possibly go on any longer."

"Granted," Prentice said. "Bailiff?"

The bailiff popped up. "Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye, this honorable court is adjourned till nine o'clock tomorrow morning."

Chapter Twenty-Two

The Mountain Chant

BANNER pushed his chestnut unmercifully all the way to Yellow Gap. He had left the court in a rush, without even taking time to explain to Dodge or Cristina. The sense of urgency in him was too great. At the cut-off, he turned north. The sun was dying in the west, turning the shadows crimson in the bottom of the twisting gorges. He saw the pockmarks of fresh hoofprints in the sand. Then, sliding down a steep cut into a broad wash, he sighted the horse.

It was Tilfego's animal, cropping peacefully at a patch of buff sacaton. Banner pulled up beside the buckskin, finding the reins trailing, unhitched. He gathered them up and led the horse on northward, through the gathering twilight. It filled him with a sick sense of guilt that he had sent the man out here. He reached a plateau and heard the cursing from the benches ahead.

"*Chingados*, I hope they get the *corajes, que padrotes*. I hope they get worse than the *corajes, que rumberos, sinverguenza*—"

"Tilfego!"

The cursing stopped. The man's immense sombrero and moon face were visible above the edge of the drop-off. His blank surprise turned to a broad grin and he struggled up through the notch till he was on the plateau.

"*Hombre*, what luck, what happiness. I was watch for man from the north like you say. I think I know where Joe Garry and Breed they are. But they get around behind me and start shooting. My horse he spook. I get in arroyo. They kill me I think if other man he do not come."

Banner bent sharply toward him. "What man?"

Tilfego shook his head. "Him I could not see. But they go down in canyon after him. They shoot."

Banner's voice was tight. "Then it must have been our man, Tilfego. How long ago?"

"Hour, maybe two. The shooting sound like they chase him off to the east."

"Then they must have holed him up somewhere," Banner said. "Joe Garry came in to get Hackett and the rest of his crew."

"Maybe we can follow the trail," Tilfego said.

It was not hard for Tilfego to find the tracks. They led away from the Yellow Gap cut-off on one of the dim cattle trails that wound tortuously through the rough and twisted land to the east. But night came, with its blackness, and slowed them down to a snail's pace. At last Banner halted, in a narrow wash.

"We'll never catch them going this slow," he said. "We've got to take a chance, Tilfego. Where would a man run to, around here?"

"All flatlands beyond. Not much cover a man could take."

"Then there's only one possibility. The Navahos are holding their Mountain Chant east of Yellow Gap. It can't be too much farther. If that was Adakhai they saw in the canyon, wouldn't it be logical for him to seek refuge with his people?"

Tilfego nodded. "I know where the Indians they build the big corral. Pretty near the trading-post. We can reach it in hour."

They forced their horses through the night, keeping to the direction they had already been taking, leaving the benchlands and coming into the vast sage flats. And finally they saw the ruddy glow of the great fire, far ahead, and then the immense corral, built of cedar boughs, piled eight feet high, with only one opening, toward the east.

The Mountain Chant was one of the most important ceremonies of the year and the Navahos had been gathering for days, camping around the chosen spot. Now most of the throng was within the immense corral, but a small crowd still eddied back and forth around the gate, and latecomers were constantly passing through the deserted cookfires and tents and wagons.

The Indians had worn their best clothing and all their jewelry for the annual ceremony, and it gave the scene a barbaric splendor. Banner and Tilfego began passing men laden with silver, great bosses of it as big as saucers studding their belts, silver bow-guards and heavy bracelets jangling at their wrists. Women crossed back and forth, draped with necklaces of

turquoise and clamshell and cannel coal.

The crowd thickened as the two men neared the gate, and it was slow going. Then Tilfego spurred his horse against Banner and pointed at a copse of cottonwoods near the south end of the great corral. A dozen horses were hitched beneath the trees. Light from a near-by cookfire flickered high enough for Banner to see the black, with the Broken Bit barely discernible on its dusty rump.

"Hackett," Tilfego said. "They must have drive our man over here, all right. He try to escape by going inside corral. They would not leave their horse otherwise."

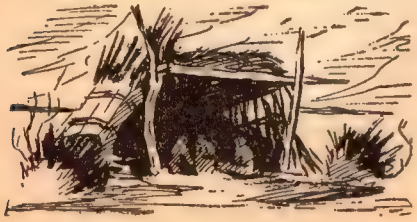
"Then we've got to get inside too. We can move faster on foot. How about that hitchrack?"

Another line of horses stood at an improvised hitchrail near the corral. They tied their animals to it, and began to push their way through the Indians. The glow of the big fire inside the corral blossomed against the velvet backdrop of the sky like a rosy nimbus, lighting the coppery faces all about Banner. As they neared the gate, a young man on a pinto shouted angrily at them.

"Haish aniti, ha'at iisha?"

"What he say?" Tilfego asked nervously.

"He asked who we were and what we wanted," Banner told him. "A lot of them don't want white people at these ceremonies." He turned to the Indian, speaking in Navaho. "I am Yellow Hair, the friend of Adakhai. We look for him here."



The young man was unconvinced, and shouted to a pair of friends beyond Banner. They began to force their horses through the crowd, closing in on Banner and the Mexican, their faces ruddy with anger in the smoky firelight. But an old man called to them, telling them to cause no trouble on this holy night. Then an eddy of the crowd carried Banner and Tilfego through the gate.

The roar of the great fire in the center of the corral provided a constant undertone to the cacophony of other sounds. The crowd held back from its intense heat, leaving a large open space all around it, in which the dances were given. When Banner found an empty Studebaker wagon, he climbed up on the seat, looking out across the veritable ocean of sweating faces and barbaric blankets and glimmering silver.

Many of the ceremonies had already been performed, and he saw that the Plumed Arrow Dance had now begun. The patient had been carried out close to the fire, where he sat on the ground, wrapped to the eyes in a buffalo robe. It was the same palsied old man Banner had seen at Red Lake. The two performers were doing a measured dance around him, holding up their plumed arrows, singing the First Song of the Mountain Sheep.

"Yiki Casizini
Kac tsilke cigini
Kac Katso yiscani . . ."

Singing of the young man with his sacred implement, the holy young man with his plumed arrow. Giving three

coyote yelps and thrusting the long arrows deep down their throats, while the awed crowd watched.

"Can you see anything?" Tilfego asked.

Banner shook his head helplessly. "Not Adakhai."

"Maybe was not him?"

"Who else would have come over here?"

"I would, if they was chase me, and I know this was here."

"Whoever it is, we've got to reach him before Hackett does. You go around toward the north. I'll keep going this way. We'll cover twice as much ground that way and meet on the other side. If you find him first, whether it's Adakhai or not, try to get hold of a chief and make him understand what's happening. If they know Jahzini's life depends on it, the Indians will help you."

Banner dropped off the wagon and shoved into the crowd, away from Tilfego. Through a break in the ranks, he saw that the dancers had pulled their plumed arrows out of their throats, giving three coyote yelps, and the first one had started blessing the patient. He was applying the sacred arrow to the soles of his feet, his knees, his hands, his abdomen, giving three coyote yelps at each spot, until he reached the mouth, and had driven the bear's spirit from the patient.

Then, beyond the patient, beyond the dancers, clear across the compound, in the dense crowd on the other side of the corral, Banner saw Arles.

The man was not watching the dancers. He was lighting a cigarette, and watching a point ahead of him in the crowd, and moving inexorably toward that point. In the treacherous firelight, his face looked almost black.

Banner acted without thought, pushed by a breathless sense of urgency. He pushed his way through the packed crowd to the first ranks and broke free and ran into the open, heading straight across the compound toward the other side. The heat of the fire struck at him in a searing wave, but he forced himself on. He was twenty feet out from the crowd when the earth seemed to spin from beneath him. He fell to his knees, blinded, every breath seeming to sear his lungs. A jeering cry rose from the crowd, and one of the young men shouted at him.

"Did you not think it was hot, *belinkana?* Did you not think our dancers were holy?"

Crouched there, shaking his head, Banner knew how foolish he had been. How the dancers ever stood the heat of that fire was one of the things no white man had ever been able to answer. Jahzini had taken Banner to a Mountain Chant when he was a boy, and he had seen a white man try to approach the fire. He had fainted before he had gotten within thirty feet of it.

Banner crawled back to the crowd, reached a wagon, pulled himself to his feet by a wheel. The Indians were still jeering and making jokes at his expense. He looked across the compound again.

He saw that the Plumed Arrow Dance was over; the two young men had retired to the Medicine Hogan. Other dancers were trooping into the compound. On the other side of the corral, in front of the first ranks of watchers, a little girl was swaying back and forth before a blanket on which a feather mysteriously followed every movement of her body. The Mountain Top Shooting Arrows entered from the

west with their lightning-sticks which were constructed like folding hatracks, that leaped in and out like painted tongues. They sang the ancient song to the Slayer and to the Son of Water, and the drums made the night throb.

The constant whirl of dancers made it hard for Banner to see beyond them into the crowd. But finally he realized that Arles had moved. No matter how Banner searched he could not see that sardonic face.

He began to stagger through the crowd, moving around the circle toward the other side. That Hackett and his men would think of doing it here was evidence of their desperation. It was their last chance to save themselves. It was Arles's last chance.

Yet, as desperate an attempt as it was, they might make it, with luck. All the Indians were gradually pressing in as close to the fire as possible, to watch the dances. It left open spaces between their rear ranks and the walls of the corral. A man could stand in those black shadows by the cedar-bough wall and break through to the outside immediately after shooting. It was possible that he could get away without being identified.

Banner had almost reached the Medicine Hogan in the west end when he saw Big Red. The man stood beside an empty linchpin wagon near the *hogan*. For that moment the babble of sound seemed to fade. It was only the two of them, staring at each other across the dense mass of the crowd. Then Big Red started toward Banner. Anger ran rawly through Banner, filling him with the impulse to meet the man, to get his hands on something tangible. But he knew he did not have time for that. He turned to shove his way through the crowd in front of the Medicine Hogan, trying to get ahead of the Hackett rider. As he shouldered past a pair of young Navahos, one wheeled in anger, jabbing at him with an elbow.

"*Juthla hago ni—*"

Banner blocked the blow, pretending he did not understand the vile curse, and stumbled on. He saw that he had gotten past Red, that the press of the mob was holding the man up.

Then, fifty feet beyond, Joe Garry.

Desperately, Banner changed directions. But Garry wheeled to cut across and block him again. He tried to turn back, saw that would take him into Red again. He spun around a last time and tried to drive through the Navahos to the front ranks and open ground. It was too late. Joe Garry brutally shoved an old couple aside and stepped in front of Banner, one scarred hand on his gun.

"Don't be a fool," Banner said. "Pull that gun and they'll mob you."

"Nobody needs a gun, Lee," Big Red said.

He was right behind, and Banner started to wheel involuntarily. But Red grabbed his arm, checking his whirling motion, trying to twist his arm into a hammerlock. Banner fought to get free, but Garry lunged in and hit him in the face.

Blinded by the blow, held from behind by Red, Banner lashed out wildly with a boot. He felt it catch Garry in the stomach.

The man reeled back, doubled over, making a retching sound. At the same time, Red twisted Banner's arm up into his back with a violent wrench. Banner shouted with the stabbing pain. It bent him forward helplessly, his wild struggles were useless.

Then he heard Red grunt from be-

hind, and he was released. He fell to his knees, sick with the pain of his twisted arm. It was a great effort to rise, to turn. He saw Adakhai standing above the fallen redhead, a shovel in his hands.

"*Ahalani, anaai.*"

Banner could not help his feeble grin.

"Greetings, brother," he answered. "You came out of a cloud."

"I have been trying to catch up with you for some time," Adakhai said. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to help you," Banner said. He gestured at Joe Garry, still sitting on the ground, the pain of the kick turning his face to parchment. "That is one of the men who shot at you on the Yellow Gap cut-off this afternoon."

The Indian looked puzzled. "I was not shot at on the cut-off. I have been here since yesterday."

Banner stared at him blankly. "You mean you were not coming this afternoon to tell that you had seen the murder?"

The Indian placed his hand over his heart. "You saved my life, Yellow Hair. You showed me that a white man could understand our ways and our gods. You are my brother now and if I had seen the killing at Yellow Gap, I would tell you. But I cannot say what is not true."

"Then they weren't after you—"

Banner broke off, wheeling around, staring into the crowd beyond. Then he began running again, knowing he had lost too much time already. He heard Adakhai call from behind, but did not answer. He passed the Medicine Hogan, plunging into the packed crowd again, pushing his way through.

All the dancers had left the compound, now. Young horsebackers were dragging in new logs at the ends of their ropes to throw on the center fire. It was shooting up to the heavens once more in a great pyre. The climax of the evening was about to begin. The Fire Dance.

From outside the corral where they had been spraying each other with the sacred medicine, the twelve young dancers began to run in, their naked bodies painted white, their cedar-bark torches blazing, their shrill cries of the sandhill crane filling the air.

"*Prrr! Eh-yah! Prrr! Ehyah—*"

Banner reached the spot where he had first seen Arles, and began looking frantically for the man, pushed this way and that by angry Indians as he forced his way through their tightly packed ranks. Even here the heat of the fire was so great that the Navahos could not stand still, and shifted constantly back and forth like a restless sea.

Out in the center, the twelve dancers were cavorting about the pyre like fiendish marble statues come to life. Their chant was growing wilder as they circled. They had ignited their torches in the flames and were beating at each other with them.

"*The time when they came out of the earth!*
Hostudi's fire is put upon us.
But it does me no harm,
I am holy with the fire . . ."

Then Banner saw Kitteridge.

The man was over by a line of wagons, a hundred yards away. The wagons were between him and the wall, but he was moving down toward the end of the line, his back to the wagons, his back to the shadows gathered blackly beneath the wall of cedar

boughs. And it was in those shadows Arles would be. Waiting for Kitteridge to move out from behind the last wagon.

"Kitteridge," Banner shouted, at the top of his voice. But the man did not seem to hear him over the chant of the dancers, the frenzied shouting of the mob, the frantic beat of the drums. "Kitteridge, watch out, don't move from behind that wagon." Banner screamed it. "Kitteridge, for God's sake—"

"The torch they put on me does not injure me,
The torch they put on me does not injure me.
I am holy with the fire . . ."

Like flaming demons, dancing around the blaze, running into the bed of coals, scattering them and stamping them out, whipping each other with their blazing torches. And all the while, Lee Banner, fighting to get free of the crowd, seeing that there was only a moment left.

Banner did not shout again, knowing the man could not hear. As Kitteridge stepped away from the wagon, exposing his back to the wall, Banner finally broke free of the crowd, clawing at his gun.

In the same instant that he saw the first fluttering motion from the shadows by the wall, Banner heard the clank of spurs from behind him. His whole body stiffened with the impulse to wheel and meet it. But he knew that if he did, he would never save Kitteridge.

He threw himself full length onto the ground, firing at the movement in the shadows. Hackett's gun roared from behind. But the bullet passed over Banner's head and ate into the earth five feet from him.

Sprawled on his belly, Banner fired again into those shadows, wondering why Hackett's next shot did not hit him, and fired again, and again, till the vague movement became a man, became Arles, staggering out from the wall, doubled over, hugging his bloody belly, dropping his gun, pitching onto his face.

"I am holy with it.
I am holy with it.
I am holy with it . . ."

Chapter Twenty-Three

Lost: A Thousand Years

THERE was a great silence. The dancers had stopped, the drums had stopped, and the shouting of the crowd had stopped. Banner got to his feet, trembling in reaction now, turning to see why Hackett had not killed him.

The man lay on the ground ten feet behind Banner, ringed by a dense mass of Indians. His great cartwheel spurs held his heels six inches off the ground. He was dead.

Banner stared at him. It was as if his emotions had been numbed. He could feel no shock, no triumph.

He looked finally to see who had shot Hackett. Tilfego stood on top of one of the wagons, far down the line from Kitteridge. His gun was still in his hand. Banner raised his hand in a salute of gratitude, then turned to meet Kitteridge.

"You took a big chance for me," Kitteridge said in a low voice. "I owe you

more thanks than I'll ever be able to give."

"Just tell me one thing."

"It's what I was coming down here to tell you. It took me a long time to think it out. A man gets twisted up inside when he's run like that, for five years—"

"I think I understand, Kitteridge."

"I was the one Hackett's men jumped in the cut-off this afternoon," Kitteridge said. "They drove me in this direction. When I saw the corral, I thought I could shake them in the crowd—" He broke off, moistening his lips. "You were right, Lee. I saw Arles kill Wallace Wright. I was afraid my true identity would be discovered if I got hauled into court to testify. But at the last, I knew that even if you'd rigged that telegram to suck me out, I couldn't let an innocent man die—"

Banner gazed at him a long time. Then he became aware of the stirring of the crowd, and turned to see Adakhai, standing on the outer fringe, with Cristina. She was staring wide-eyed at Kitteridge, and Banner knew she had overheard his confession. She seemed to take her eyes off him with great effort, turning to Banner, starting toward him as she spoke.

"Ramirez told me Hackett had left town. I guessed what it meant. I knew that if they were after Adakhai, he might seek refuge here. When I found nothing at Yellow Gap, I came on." She shook her head wonderingly. "But it wasn't Adakhai—"

"You and I made the same mistake," Banner said. He turned toward the man, forcing it out. "You'll want to know about Julia. She may have thought I was the one, Kitteridge. But you were always between us. She'll be waiting for you, in town."

Kitteridge met Banner's eyes a long time, as if letting it soak in. Then he grasped Banner's arm, voice husky with emotion.

"You're really a man to ride the river with, counselor."

Cristina was looking up at Banner, searching his face. "It seems to cause you no great pain, to tell him that."

He realized she was right. Somehow it did not hurt him as he had thought it would, to cut the final bonds that held him to Julia. Maybe they had not been the bonds that he had thought they were. There had been passion, there had been intense emotion. But somehow it had not been as fulfilling as merely standing here, looking down into Cristina's face.

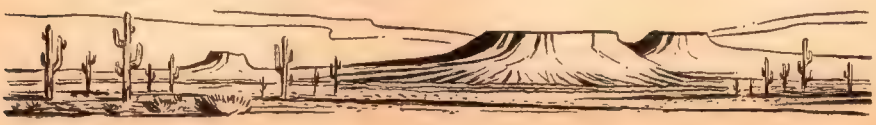
"Perhaps, then," she said, "I can answer the question you asked this afternoon. No thousand years stands between us, Lee. I know that now." She lowered her voice, till it was only for him. "Not even a foot, if you want it that way."

He would have taken her in his arms, but the crowd held him from that. He put his hands in hers, and it was enough.

"Yes," he said, simply. "I want it that way."

"*Que barbaridad*," Tilfego said, from behind them. "What are we waiting for? Let us all go in and get married."

THE END



VIRGIN TERRITORY

IT WAS during the worst Indian scare yet that Black Bret Prior got both feet in it. Black Bret was a newcomer then, having just claimed his half-section of southern Oregon's free land. Though it was his first winter of Indian fighting, he was doing well in that respect. The trouble was girls.

Bret had taken an arrow through his arm, which got him demobilized from the volunteer militia. And while the Rogues were not given to playing Cupid, that was what they did that fall! His wound having turned him into a home defender, they got Bret cooped up at Gunderson's stage station with a bevy of young women all anxious to relieve him of his bachelorhood. Both within and without the log walls it was getting pretty hot for him.

His handicap was not the hurt arm, which was usable and healing without trouble. Rather it was a physique such as caused Delilah overpowering emotions back when Samson was around. Coupled to that was a dark handsomeness of face and a nature so responsive Bret could deny no one a service if he could render it. He had no aversion to girls. His big frame filled with rapture when he came within range of a pretty one. But he *wanted* only one girl. And he didn't want her to give him the feeling all girls did. He wanted it to be so outstanding he would recognize her the minute he saw her.

But, firing through a loophole as fast as he could ram home powder and balls, Bret's immediate concern was the fact that the Rogues were whamming lead and arrows at the station and were going to get in and burn Gunderson's outbuildings if they weren't prevented. It just wasn't in

A Story of the Oregon Country

by

GIFF CHESHIRE

With the Rogues on the prowl outside and three grimly determined females inside, handsome bachelor Bret Prior doesn't stand a chance!

Bret to want all those females scalped or roasted alive even if that would extricate him from more personal difficulties.

There were five men besides Bret, four old ones and Preacher Hodges. They had all flocked here, as instructed by the militia commander in case of an Indian raid. That had happened that afternoon, with word coursing along the creek that a band of twenty-odd bucks was in the vicinity. The circuit rider was only passing through on his way from the Willamette to the California mines. The settlement's other men were in the militia, fighting the organized hostiles who were making a general uprising, too distant to get help to the station.

It had got dark and Bret was thinking in the sudden, stabbing-out way to which he was accustomed. Tamping a charge in the hot rifle barrel, he called across the candle-lit room to Kitch Kester. At the moment Kitch was staring at the loophole he confronted, looking so savage Bret wondered if he was about to crawl through after the marauders. Though the candle was needed for them to load by, this curtained main room of the stage station was so clouded by powdersmoke it did little good.

"Kitch," Bret said, "there's too many blind sides to these outbuildings. Now that it's dark they'll have one burning. Then the whole works'll go, and us with it."

"I already reached that conclusion," Kitch grunted. He was gray and bent and his hook-nosed brown face glistened with sweat. "Now I'm trying to get away from it."

"Seems to me I could do some good

moving around outside," Bret said.

Kitch pulled trigger. "It ain't that bad, Bret. What I mean is, gettin' married ain't. But if your spirit's quit and you can't wait till they finish us, just hold your rifle to your head."

"Cut it out, Kitch!" Bret barked. He was good and tired of Kitch's sanding him about the situation. Jeopardy just hadn't dampered the hunting instinct in certain young ladies besieged here. "You can handle this. I'm going to see what I can do outdoors."

"Better eat first," Kitch advised. "Man ought to die contented." He chuckled. "And you better tell Quarrelsome and old Brackenbush what you're up to. They might pot you by mistake. Or not by mistake, come to think of it."

"Your jokes sure tickle my ribs," Bret snapped. He swung off.

The room he entered was the one where the women and children were huddled, but he had to pass through it to get where he was going. It had been designed for the inner, protected containment of such weak and unresourceful creatures as women and perforce was as dark as the inside of a chimney. His flesh began to crawl.

Bret liked Preacher Hodges, who would go down on both knees to pray or on one to fight Indians. But he didn't share the matrons' opinion that it was a comfort to have the preacher here in this hour of peril. There were younger, more optimistic attitudes among the girls. Once the circuit rider departed, if he ever did, he wouldn't be back for months. At least two in this inner room hoped to have need of his services before he left. And Black Bret had reason to know two fathers within the station had more than hopes. They had intentions.

The men were scattered around the station so that all sides were covered, which had worked pretty well through the evening when the attack had started. Among these was Quarrelsome Quincy, a hill-country man, and old Colonel Brackenbush, an ex-planter. Both were from a section of the republic where womanhood was held in touchy regard. It happened that both had misinterpreted certain animations on the part of their daughters as having been induced intentionally by Black Bret. Both men were given to backing their conclusions with whatever was required to enforce them.

The first thing Bret did in this room was to bump into something soft and warm and in a dress. He grunted, "Excuse me," and the instant his voice registered, the shape pressed closer. A small warm hand touched his cheek. Two arms came up. They were accompanied by a perfume identifying the old colonel's Ethelind, a dark-eyed girl whose warm lips were an engraved invitation to trouble.

By stiffening his neck, Bret kept his face from bobbing down to them. She whispered, "Bret! I've been so worried about you!"

Since up to that point he had only risked himself to the same extent as the others, this didn't exalt Bret, even though delivered in a lovely, intimate voice. He pulled down the arms. But a hand caught his and a queer liveliness shot out from his spine and wrapped around his heart. That happened every time he kissed Ethelind, which he did occasionally when he couldn't bring himself to disappoint her upturned face. It was his getting caught at it that had turned the old colonel watchful. Brackenbush had a sharp sense of chivalry.

Bret got loose, and, with another door behind him, breathed easier. This was the big heavily curtained kitchen of the stage station. It also was lighted palely by the stub of a tallow candle. Bret blinked his eyes when he saw a girl at the loophole across from Quarrelsome Quincy.

It was Kitch Kester's Hester, the only girl in the settlement Bret felt at ease with, mainly because there was nothing much to give her an aggressive confidence. She left Bret in peace, save for the way her large gray eyes worshiped him in hopeless longing. She was small and trim-figured but mighty plain of face. He liked that for the way it clipped her horns, even while he realized it was hard on Hester.

It didn't surprise Bret to find her whamming away at something useful. Kester's Hester was like that. At a settlement dance or picnic you would find her fussing with food or the babies, while Ethelind Brackenbush and Drusilla Quincy would be on or in the arms of the young men. And around her father's claim she was apt to be out plowing, while many settlement girls were taking whey to their complexions.

It struck Bret that she was the only girl in the station he had never kissed, not only because she had never invited him but because he had never wanted to. There was, of course, no mystery as to that.

Hester popped a shot through the loophole and retracted the rifle to load it. It was then that she noticed Bret. She raised her eyebrows and he grinned to show her they hadn't yet been overcome. The friendly gesture brought a twitching reaction to Hester's mouth. She began to punch the ramrod down the gun barrel. The trouble was that she hadn't yet put in the load.

Bret crossed to Quarrelsome Quincy, who was a gaunt, dour man given to wearing a moth-eaten coonskin cap. "Leave me get out, Quarrelsome, and be careful what you shoot at for a while. Aim to do a little poking around."

Quarrelsome looked back with a scowl. He hadn't been friendly since the time his daughter had been obliged to spend a night in Bret's cabin, having got caught by a blizzard while delivering some wild-apple jell. Her undertaking such an errand in the face of foul weather had been prompted by a woman's selfless generosity. But since then Quarrelsome had worn a look indicating that Bret's helping her home the next day hadn't been enough. So had his daughter Drusilla.

"You'll get an arrow through your gizzard," Quarrelsome said, and his voice suggested that it wouldn't sadden him any. Redheaded and breathtaking, Drusilla could land any bachelor in the settlement once the men got back from the war and something had caused her to forget Bret Prior.

Bret saw worry on the plain face of Kester's Hester. She had heard and appeared about to say something in protest, but she didn't do it. Bret snuffed the candle so as not to back-light himself when he went through the door. He made certain it was really his powder horn and bullet pouch he had strapped over his shoulder. Then he stepped out.

This wasn't a shrieking, galloping Indian fracas, but a grim and determined siege. Gunderson's station served the Crescent City stage line. Since Gunderson had planned it with an eye

on the hostile Rogues, it had been designated as the settlement's refuge. Set against a rock cliff, its rear had been protected as long as the defenders could see to discourage an approach from the sides, which was required to get in among the outbuildings. That advantage had evaporated in the dusk and was gone with the night. Even in the darkness Bret's sally was risky. Not only were the Rogues pretty accurate with an arrow, they had got hold of contraband guns.

Black Bret got across the yard to the woodshed without drawing a challenge. He paused to pull in a heavy breath, looking about. Beyond clearings, right and left, were woods the Rogues were using for cover. Above the copse to the east a silver moon was beginning to show. The crackling of gunfire was spaced-out, stubborn, the vaulting rise of the rock cliff in the rear reassuring. Bret made another run and this time got to the big barn where the relay horses were kept.

Something whumped into the wall as he went through the end door. Bret's shoulders hunched, for, though he was a courageous man, he had once known the feel of an arrow. He halted within the door as a second arrow bit into its planks, his flesh crawling with the fear that there were already Rogues inside. He was in the nick of time, if not too late—the savage hidden in the rocks along the base of the cliff was either trying to get in to the barn for destructive purposes or was covering one who already had.

Bret turned his back on the black interior and tried to locate his foe. Even with the scant light he could make out half a dozen places where the Rogue might be. Presently he heard a wild, low call out there, either for help or a warning to someone inside. He fired a pot shot and was rewarded by a deep silence. He rammed home a fresh charge, still expecting an assault from behind. Then something came at him out of the obscurity to his right.

Dreading the bite of steel, Bret met it. His sweeping hand caught an upthrust arm. His knee came up with all the force in his powerful legs and he heard a sickened grunt. The nearly naked body tried to slither away. Bret got a neck-and-leg hold in his next try. He swung the Rogue and hurled him against the barn wall and in the same instant heard the sound of lightly racing feet. He went through the door with his rifle clubbed, to see four of them driving toward the barn. For close-in work they preferred their knives, though he could see bows in swinging hands. Letting out a ripping yell, since help would not be out of place, Bret waded in.

He flattened two, dodged the others, and made a run for the station. They came after him, but their frenzy let him draw them into range of Hester's long-barreled rifle. She was on the job. Bret heard a boom, and one of the Rogues hit the ground with his face. The other swung and went shrieking away, but this took him to a distance where Bret could use his own muzzle-loader. He did, and judged that his sally had put five of them out of action.

"You had a good hunch," Quarrelsome's voice called grudgingly from the station porch.

"Bret Prior, you come back inside!" Hester yelled through her loophole. "You're on borrowed time, already!"

"You let Hester handle the kitchen," Bret told Quarrelsome. "If you get in the woodshed and I climb to the barn

haymow, we can stop anything trying to get in."

"Just a minute," Quarrelsome said, and he went back indoors.

Bret made another run for the barn. A spate of angry shooting from the brush informed him the other hostiles had divined what had happened. But he got to the barn, and to make certain the Rogues he had knocked out did not revive to menace him further, he dragged them inside and locked them in the grain bin. Then he went up the ladder to the haymow, from where he could watch everything Quarrelsome would be unable to see from the back of the woodshed.

Bret began to feel pretty good. He had fended off what would have been certain disaster.

The siege settled back into routine. Bret lay stretched in the loose hay which filled the mow, powder and bullets beside him, shooting at the blots of fire he saw in the bushes. Presently he saw Quarrelsome make a fast, weaving run to the woodshed and disappear.

Bret relaxed. Likely they could hold out until morning now, and daylight might bring new opportunities.

The quiet held. Though it began to appear that they had beaten off the attack, Bret aimed to stay where he was until dawn. The scant moon presently disappeared behind clouds, which wasn't reassuring, but the quiet ran on. Then he saw a figure between the barn and closest shed and nearly fired before he saw that it was skirted and racing toward him.

He called, "What in blazes?" but the figure sped on and disappeared below. He thought it must be Kester's Hester, who was the only woman present who would have courage enough to come out into a situation like this. He got to the head of the ladder, and this impression was confirmed by the agile way the girl climbed toward him.

He bawled, "Don't you have sense enough to warn me? I might have blown a hole in your head!"

"Bret! I've been so worried about you!"

Those were the very words Ethelind Brackenbush had used earlier. But it wasn't Ethelind's voice. Nor was it Hester's. It was Drusilla Quincy who climbed into the haymow, panting, and before he knew it Bret felt her arms around his neck.

"You get out of here!" he thundered, but she only pressed closer, and in his consternation he forgot to pull himself free.

"Let me stay, Bret! If you die, I want to, too!"

"Lord A'mighty, girl, there hasn't been a shot in two hours! Your daddy couldn't have helped seeing you come past the woodshed, if he's still awake! He's already—!"

"It doesn't matter, Bret! Nothing matters but us!"

He didn't kiss her because he intended to. But she had pulled his head down and her mouth was against his, and his lip muscles took action he hadn't authored. Drusilla moaned and the sound was too delighted to stem from fear.

"I could die happy," she whispered, "if it was as Missus Prior."

"You get back to the station," Bret said, and quickly disengaged himself. "They'll think—what'll they think?" But his mind was mainly on Quarrelsome Quincy.

"What do we care? I'm not ashamed of our love."

Bret went back to the hayloft open-

ing because it still seemed advisable to keep a lookout for Indians. All was quiet, toward the woods and also toward the station. He heard Drusilla slip up beside him and began to hope she had got past Quarrelsome without being noticed. It was not inconceivable that, with the quiet, the old coot had gone to sleep.

Drusilla perched herself on the piled hay and seemed set for the duration. Bret kept at a safe distance, wondering why women were so quick to assume romantic intentions when a man only meant to be kindly. He figured to let her stay here a while, then send her scooting back to the station. Fortunately the impulse to wrap herself around something seemed to have left her. No trouble erupted from the station and her touchy sire. Bret began to relax.

It wasn't for more than a few minutes, in which neither of them moved a finger. Bret pulled his shoulders back but it was because something was moving below them, at the bottom of the ladder. Thinking of the Rogues he had locked in the granary, Bret made a quieting motion to the girl and slipped back through the hay.

It wasn't an Indian. His eyes were used enough to the dark that he could make out a coonskin cap lifting into the mow. Bret's flesh went cold.

"Everything's all right, Quarrelsome!" he said hastily. "You better get back to your post!"

"Hah," Quarrelsome said, and he came on up and looked around.

Bret nearly slumped in a heap when he himself failed to see Drusilla. He hoped she had jumped through the opening, though it was quite a drop and he hadn't heard a plop. A curious thought struck him, *Now, how did Quarrelsome get across the barnyard without us seeing him?*

There was only one answer. Quarrelsome had seen his daughter slipping out to the barn. He had waited long enough for any damage to be done that was going to be, then had sneaked up under cover. Drusilla couldn't have suspected that or she wouldn't have jumped out the opening.

Quarrelsome began to kick through the hay. Bret grinned to himself, revising his opinion of Drusilla's resourcefulness. In an innocent voice he said, "What're you looking for, Quarrelsome? You got a jug buried up here?"

There was a sudden, unmistakable "Ouch!" and there she was, stretched flat and nearly buried in the hay.

After a long moment Quarrelsome grunted, "You want to come along to the station with her, Prior, or do I bring Preacher Hodges here?"

"Now, look—!" Bret began.

"Look nothing. This time you ain't getting out of it." Quarrelsome stepped back and raised the muzzle of his rifle until Bret was staring straight at it. "Get moving toward that ladder. And you, too, you hussy."

For some reason, Drusilla didn't seem nearly as dejected as Black Bret Prior. She clung to his arm possessively as they floundered through the hay toward the ladder.

Bret could have crawled through a crack in the puncheon floor when he discovered that serenity had brought most of the settlers into the big kitchen, where someone had made a kettle of coffee. Old Colonel Brackenbush took a look at the combination of man, girl, father, and rifle and blew out his snowy cheeks.

"What is this, suh?" he demanded.

Quarrelsome gave him a flat grin. "This, Colonel, is the start of a bang-up wedding."

"A wedding?" the colonel said, aghast. "Why, Prior is as good as—!"

"You said it. Fetch the preacher."

It was Ethelind who took up the matter. She had lifted a hand to her mouth when Bret came in under armed escort. She had bit the hand while she listened. Except for Kester's Hester she might have fallen to the floor. Hester ran to her side, put an arm around her waist, and supported her.

That was all Ethelind did, but it made the colonel pull up his shoulders and clamp down his brow. His hand drew the cap-and-ball pistol from his belt.

Black Bret swallowed. It was the first time he had ever been covered by two men with divergent notions.

"Daughter!" Brackenbush roared, "no triflin', blackguard scum is going to break your heart and live to see it!"

"I—I believed him," Ethelind whimpered. "I—I trusted him."

"Quarrelsome Quincy!" thundered the colonel, "*you* go fetch the circuit rider!"

"Not much!" Quarrelsome snapped. "Prior, pad your feet into the other room!"

"Stand in your tracks, Prior!" warned Brackenbush.

"She's lying in her teeth," said Drusilla. "If Miss Ethelind Brackenbush ever stood a chance with Black Bret it was of spraining an arm trying to hold onto him."

Ethelind got her strength back with miraculous speed. She whirled and stared at Drusilla. "Why, you love-sick calf!" she blazed. "Risking your scalp to get down to the barn with Bret! I heard your father come in and whisper something to you! I bet he planned it!"

For the moment Drusilla Quincy was the fire-spitting image of old Quarrelsome. "Imagine that from you!" she breathed. "He can't come near you without you acting like a scared cat going up a tree!"

"Ladies," warned Kester's Hester, "there are gentlemen present. Trying to do right by you both."

"You're darned catootin'!" Quarrelsome growled. "Somebody fetch the circuit rider and let's get it done."

The colonel turned, and Bret's knees nearly buckled in relief when the pistol swung to cover Quarrelsome Quincy.

"Drop that rifle, suh," Brackenbush ordered. "Your schemin' trick will do you no good."

"Plug me," said Quarrelsome, "and I'll plug your one slim chance of gettin' a son-in-law afore I die." He kept the rifle trained.

Bret nearly jumped out of his boots, but the shot that rang out had been fired in another room. It was answered by a raveling volley outdoors.

A settler wife shrieked, grabbed her children and ran for the inside room. The others followed. The old colonel made a complete turn before he got lined out for his battle station. Quarrelsome Quincy bolted for his loophole. It left Black Bret standing dumbfounded, staring at Hester.

"The Lord has shown you His mercy," Hester said.

"Maybe," Bret agreed. "Unless my luck clabbers and we fight 'em off again." He caught up his rifle and swung for the outside door.

He thought it was Quarrelsome following to resume the previous defense

and did not understand why this continued all the speeding way to the station barn. He didn't look until he was through the door, for it was coming hot and heavy from the brush.

Within the barn he yelled, "Blazes, Quarrelsome, you'd do a sight more good in the woodshed!— Damme, Hester, what're you doing here?"

"Kitch Kester," said Hester, "would love to get into that squabble between Quarrelsome and the colonel. All he lacks is an excuse. Where's the haymow?" But she had brought her rifle, which was more than Drusilla had.

Five minutes later Bret was mighty glad to have her stretched beside him, blazing away at the fire-streaked brush. The Rogues knew they were there, and once an arrow *thipped* into the hay between them. This upset the ease Bret had always felt with Hester, as did thoughts of Kitch. That little old galoot could be hell on red wheels when something riled him, and Bret wished he could see the businesslike way his plain little daughter rammed in charges and shot them off.

"Figured so," Hester breathed when the Rogues started a rush for the barn, which proved she had only been shrewd and far-seeing all along. And if she hadn't been there, it would have been too bad. Bret didn't know what was coming up on the other end of the barn, but if Quarrelsome had regained his senses he would have it covered from the woodshed again. At least half a dozen warriors came hurtling toward the barn door under the place where Bret and Hester lay. They had all they could do to stop it.

"It stood to reason," Hester concluded. "They know white folks have got a way of claiming victory too soon."

"Men or women?"

"Both."

They had broken the back of the renewed attack. There was a little more half-hearted fire from the brush, then it tapered off. But this time Bret wasn't going to leave there until full daylight. When he did leave he meant to travel as far as tired legs would take him.

He said, "Now, you get back before anybody misses you, Hester."

"Who ever does?" she asked.

He dropped a sympathetic hand on her shoulder, unthinking. Something shot up his arm that was like nothing he had ever experienced because it was the first time he had ever touched her. She turned her face toward him and in the pale light it looked beautiful. Then he saw it wasn't the poor light. She just looked beautiful, and he had never realized it until that feeling came up his arm and jolted his eyes open. She let herself rest against him a moment, when he drew her to him, and she let him have her lips for one brief instant. Then she pushed to her knees and got up and remembered to pick up her rifle.

Bret said, "Wait!" because he knew this was the feeling he had been hunting for, the feeling that would distinguish one girl from all others.

Hester's voice was shaken. "I'll get back and report that the wedding can proceed any time. Bret, what if you wind up with two wives?" She was gone before he could grab her.

Bret followed, not giving a hoot just then whether the station was properly defended. She crossed the yard like a streak, which was only good judgment considering the perils of the night. Bret followed just as fast, but only because he had to tell her she was the one he wanted before she had time to

get Quarrelsome and the colonel started again.

Quarrelsome came out of the woodshed, yelling, "Look here, Prior! How many—!" But Bret pounded through the back door behind Hester.

Kitch Kester had taken over the kitchen and was the only one in there. He stared at Bret.

"How come you're chasin' my girl?" he demanded.

"Hester!" Bret said hoarsely. "Let's call the parson and get married. Quick!"

"And get you out of your pickle?" Hester asked. "Nothing stirring, Bret Prior."

"It's not that! When I kissed you in the haymow—!"

"You kissed my girl in the haymow?" thundered Kitch.

"And she kissed me back," Bret said, "and now she won't marry me."

"By damn, she will!" Kitch said. "No girl of mine's going to trifle and wiggle out of it!" He raised his voice even higher. "Preacher Hodges!"

It was Quarrelsome Quincy who came in hastily, through the back door. Kitch Kester calmly covered him with his rifle, barking, "Back right out, Quarrelsome. I heard the goings-on in here a while ago. Get back out there and see we don't get scalped yet, with all this tomfoolery."

Quarrelsome swallowed and backed out, for Kitch looked mean. Then Preacher Hodges came in, with the old colonel right behind him.

Calmly, Kitch said, "Step over a little, Parson, so I can pot that old windbag if he makes a fuss. But we need another witness. Come in, Colonel, but if you so much as bat an eye I'll shoot off the lashes."

"This can stop any time," Hester said. "I'll marry no man to get him out of trouble."

"No woman ever did," Kitch reflected. "You going to stand up to the parson with Bret nice or do I hold a gun to your back?"

"I—" Hester looked at Bret, her eyes swimming.

The beauty was still in her face and he knew it would always be because it went clear through her. What she saw on Bret's face did something to her. Her mouth twitched, but without the old hopelessness. It was the start of incredulity, of wonder, of joy. She stared and the gray eyes turned happy, they went full of hope, they shone. The defeat quit her shoulders; they came back and were proud.

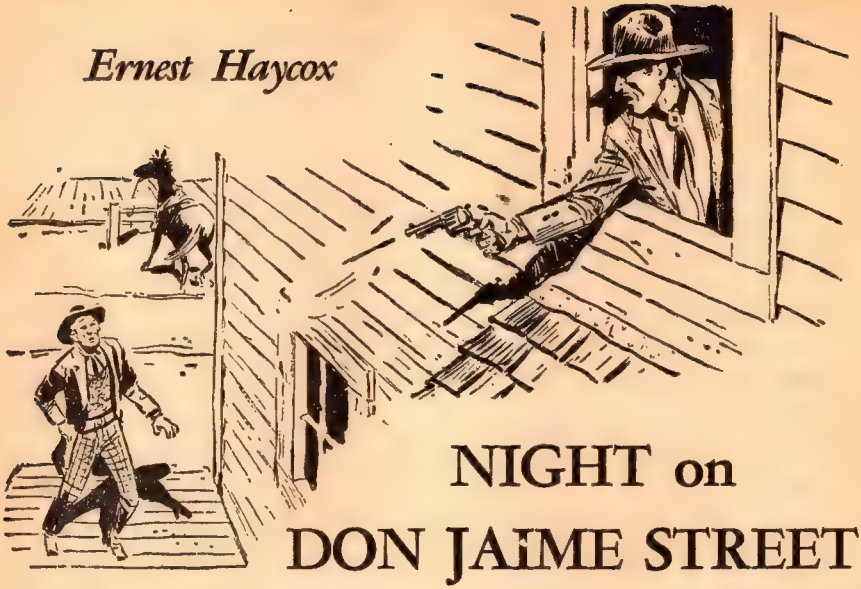
She said, "Put up your gun, Pa, or keep it on the colonel. I don't think I'm going to give you any need of it."

SINGLE-SHOT BUT RAPID-FIRE

It's no trick to shuck the loads out of a pump-gun, gas-recoil automatic, or magazine-fed lever-action rifle, none of which were available to the men who "took the hides offen buffler" in the heydey of the hide hunters. Yet, Tom Nixon killed 120 buffalo in forty minutes with a single-shot .50-caliber Sharps, breech-loading and using the metallic cartridge. His feat is more remarkable considering the fifteen pounds weight of Big Fifty, and the fact that she leaked gases around the breech like a sulphur match with each shot.

—Old Hutch

Ernest Haycox



NIGHT on DON JAIME STREET

The crises which grip Don Jaime Street mean little to the rest of town; and Curly Jack, gambler, finds this hard to understand. . . .

HIS mother's voice, never rising above a note of patient self-control, boosted him out of the front door. "The first bell is ringing, Ben. That's a new shirt—try not to get in a scuffle today."

As he crossed the street he looked behind to watch the print his shoes made in the deep dust; he made an exact turn at Mrs. Ketchum's gate and another when he reached the corner of Stafford. From the round brick-colored hills behind town came the steady grind of ore moving along the mine conveyors, like the grumbling of a great chained beast. He made up a picture of how such a beast would look and meanwhile tried not to hear the school bell's brass-gong tolling.

He was eleven, tall for his years and blackened by the Arizona sunlight. He wore long trousers, a pair of shoes with brass eyelets and a blue, double-breasted flannel shirt which was the same kind of shirt sported by Ike Ball, driver of the Tucson stage, who was a god sitting on boyhood's highest throne of worship. Halfway along Stafford he closed his eyes and turned into Lode, which was Dragoon's main street. At this early hour shadows lay beneath the board awnings and the whole town seemed deserted. Beyond the end of Lode the desert glittered under winter's bland sunlight.

He crossed Lode and entered Don Jaime Street, a narrow way connecting Lode with Border. All of Don Jaime

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was saloons and dance halls and buildings that his mother merely referred to as "those other houses." Now that the school bell had ceased to ring a kind of sleepy feeling lay over everything, and when he stamped his shoes against the loose boards of the walk echoes rattled all around. He kept his head down, fascinated by the shining of the brass eyelets on his shoes.

Then a man said, "Feelin' ornery, bub?" and he raised his head and saw Curly Jack leaning against the front of the Louvre saloon.

"No, sir," he murmured, and was shaken by an insecure feeling. This man was danger itself; he was An Outlaw whose name was spoken carefully by grown people so that he would not be angry at them. His legs were very long; his hat lay on the extreme back edge of thick yellow hair, and cigar smoke drifted in gray ribbons around his face, and as he smiled his eyelids moved close together until the light came out of them in bright streaks.

"You're Gerrish's boy," said Curly Jack. "You're Ben. You know me, Ben?"

"Yes, sir."

Curly Jack seemed to laugh inwardly and he seemed to be pleased. The cigar angled upward between his lips. "What you going to be when you get older, Ben?"

"Maybe," said young Ben, "I'll drive stage."

Curly Jack's silent laughter showed more strongly. "Come to me when that happens, Ben, and you'll never have trouble on your trips." He took something from his pocket and pressed it into young Ben's hands.

Young Ben said, "Thank you," and moved on. Opening his hand he saw that he held a $2.50 gold piece and halted dead in his tracks, knowing at once trouble would come of this.

Curly Jack called after him, "That's all right, Ben, I gave it to you," in the voice of one who would not be disobeyed.

Young Ben crossed from the north to the south walk, passing saloon doorways from which drifted the rank-bitter smell of chewed cigars and spilled whisky. The town bum lay sound asleep on the walk, his mouth a toothless opening in a gray, seamed face. A liver-colored pup sat near the painted window of the Pavilion dance hall and watched young Ben come on, his tail threshing the board walk. Young Ben paused to rub the pup's long ears and cut around the corner of the newspaper shop into Border Street. He stopped here, listening to the scrubbing run of the pup's feet.

The pup rounded the corner and crossed his front legs and fell over and over and sat up, his tongue hanging out like a red shoe flap. Young Ben took him under an arm, went by the great dark arch of the stage barn, and moved slowly to the gaunt school building sitting alone in its yard. The second bell sent out a single clap as last warning and he dropped the pup and said, "Stay there," and went up the school steps.

Curly Jack watched the boy turn the corner and his glance thereafter moved along Don Jaime Street, carefully touching the shade-drawn windows and the narrow alleys lying between buildings. The cigar teetered between his teeth; his lips drew back from the cigar. Behind him in the Louvre a swamper grumbled over a broom and the barman's murmuring talk rubbed against the emptiness of the place.

Curly Jack pushed himself from the

wall and paced down Don Jaime, moving in and out of the other saloons and dance halls to leave his brief greeting. Turning into Border, he paused at the edge of Curran's barn and had a thorough look at the horses.

As soon as he departed from the precincts of the Louvre the swamper came to the doorway and watched him. The swamper said over his shoulder, "What's he doin' in town this time of mornin'?"

The barkeep murmured, "Doc Halliday's comin'."

"Ah," said the swamper and stroked his stained mustaches with the back of a hand.

Curly Jack stopped at Curran's barn for a moment, watching one man wheel a barrow along Border's dust. Out beyond the end of Border, morning sun streamed across the desert's tawny dust and silver cacti; in the distance a haze lay over Old Mexico. Curly Jack strolled on to the north side of town and paused momentarily by Boot Hill, idly considering the unmarked and inglorious mounds of those who had died by violence and in shame. Afterward he crisscrossed Dragoon, prowling through alley and street like a restless cat, and at last came to the end of Lode Street and put his shoulder to the corner of Schermerhorn's butcher shop, once more indifferent.

Life moved thin and slow through Dragoon. One woman—the heavy and handsome Poker Belle—came out of Don Jaime and entered Lanahan's general store. Mrs. Gerrish and her daughter Hope appeared at the head of Stafford and moved forward with their parasols lifted against the sun.

Curly Jack watched the girl, who was nineteen, with an appreciative eye and then he looked at Mrs. Gerrish and the indifference changed to wonder as though something new disturbed him. These two women turned the corner and went on toward Lanahan's, serene and untouchable in the dust and rawness of this town, leaving behind the clearest picture of immaculate grace.

Mrs. Gerrish said, "We'll stop at Lanahan's first to see if the ginghams came in from Tucson. You should walk with your shoulders straighter, Hope."

Beyond Lanahan's, a young man paused in the doorway of the Wells-Fargo office, black arm protectors half covering his white shirt sleeves. He stood still with his eyes on Hope Gerrish and could not catch her attention; just before she passed into Lanahan's with her mother she looked over her shoulder and smiled at him.

In the half shadows of Lanahan's store dark shelves ran to a high ceiling, and the odors of leather and coffee and fabric blended to make a pleasantly stale air. At the far end of the counter Poker Belle gave her order to Lanahan in a brusque voice. Poker Belle's glance went to Mrs. Gerrish, covertly appraising her, and her voice dropped a full tone.

Mrs. Gerrish stood at the counter with a sweet unawareness of the other woman's presence; in a moment, having finished her business, Poker Belle departed from Lanahan's, leaving behind the rustle of her broad-striped silk dress and the rank emanation of lilac cologne. Hope Gerrish cast an oblique glance at her mother, conveying a dramatic distaste.

The ginghams had not come. Mrs. Gerrish moved to the street and paused. "Hope," she said, "it is not good manners to express your feelings in public."

"The odor was rather strong."

"Where would she learn good taste?"

Hope said, "I think I'll walk to Father's," and moved down Lode with her parasol swaying daintily under the sun. Mrs. Gerrish tarried before Lanahan's to make certain minor adjustments to her dress. From the corner of her eyes she saw her daughter go slowly past the Wells-Fargo doorway and stop and show a lady's charming surprise when young Neal Curzon came through the doorway to speak to her. Mrs. Gerrish silently said, "That was properly done," and went along Don Jaime Street, keeping to the outer edge of the walk.

The town drunkard lay asleep by the Pavilion and the Louvre's swamper brushed the refuse of an evil night across the walk in rank clouds. Of this street Mrs. Gerrish had a most complete knowledge and yet walked through it and seemed to see nothing. She had been striking when young and now was gray and sedate and still pretty; but beneath her air of soft composure lay the inflexible commandments of a gentlewoman.

At the newspaper office she left the information she wished printed regarding an oyster supper at the church, and was squired gallantly to the door by Dragoon's eccentric whisky-drinking editor, Sam Gault. Returning up Don Jaime, she met her daughter in front of the freight office, which was her husband's business. The two of them strolled leisurely homeward under the streaming sunshine.

"Neal is coming over tonight."

"You arranged it very well," said Mrs. Gerrish. "It is important never to let a man know he is being sought. Your manners are excellent, though I think you should speak of him as Mr. Curzon and not use his first name until you are engaged. Men set a value on those niceties though they do not know it. Now we shall bake cookies. I must teach you how to make the date-filled nougat. My mother gave me the recipe many years ago when we lived in Cleveland."

"You are very fond of old things," said Hope.

"They are," murmured Mrs. Gerrish, "like little lamps shining far over the desert."

Curly Jack followed Don Jaime to the last gray house sitting opposite the newspaper office and entered it without notice. He rolled up the front room's window shade to command a view of the street and pulled two chairs together, stretching himself on them; lighting a fresh cigar, he lay back in comfort. Poker Belle came downstairs in her silk dress and went obediently to him, attractive and buxom, with great black eyes now carefully studying his humors.

She said, "I hear Doc Halliday's coming to Dragoon," and by the streaky laughter of his eyes she had her answer. "Curly," she added, "you better bring your boys in. If Doc comes he won't come alone."

"Belle," he said, "get yourself a new dress. Make it a little plainer, make it—"

"Like Mrs. Gerrish's." Poker Belle looked upon him with an unresenting wisdom. "It isn't the dress."

"Something else? Well, get it."

"I'd have to start fifteen years back to get it, and if I had it I wouldn't be here. This is Don Jaime Street. They live up at the head of Stafford."

He rolled back in the chair. He worked the answer around his head, the mask of strange speculation returning

to his face. His lids crept nearer together.

"I run this town but they don't know we're alive. Why's that? What makes it that way—"

She reached out a hand to ruffle his hair. "Ah, don't think about that. It won't do you any good."

He looked up, sharp now. "You ever think about it?"

"Quit talking about it, Curly—just quit."

THE noon whistles were blowing from the mines as Ben Gerrish came along Don Jaime with the liver-colored pup behind him. He turned and said, "Stay there," and reached Lode in time to see the Tucson stage enter the street, its four horses slacking down from a dead run. Flat against the wall of Lanahan's store, young Ben watched Ike Ball tool the stage exactly before the hotel porch and clap on the brake. A solitary passenger encased in a long yellow overcoat crawled from the stage, bearing marks of travel.

Ike Ball threw down the reins to a waiting hostler and descended, a wire-drawn man with a set of agate, autocratic eyes set in a mahogany face whose features had an Indian inexpressiveness. A goatee pointed his chin.

He saw young Ben and said, "Hello there, son," and young Ben said in a smothered voice, "Yes, sir," and walked homeward with his head down, in imagination flicking flies off the ears of the stage's lead horses with the sweep of a fifteen-foot whip.

The gold piece was a round, small weight in his pocket while he ate noon meal; the problem of it had been with him all morning. In time of hurt, when he needed sympathy, it was his mother he sought; but this was a practical matter before him now and therefore he kept it to himself until he walked back toward Lode Street with his father.

"Curly Jack gave me this," he said, taking the gold piece from his pocket.

He knew what his father would say, yet dreaded to hear it. His father looked down at the gold piece. "Did you earn it, Ben?"

"No, sir. He just gave it to me."

"Ah," said his father in that cool tone young Ben knew so well. They crossed Lode into Don Jaime, seeing Curly Jack come from the Pavilion, and as they went forward the warm day grew cold to Ben and his heart began to swell against his chest. Curly Jack's face came about with that streak of brightness in the narrow apertures of his eyes.

"My son has something for you, Jack," said Gerrish.

Young Ben brought out the gold piece and held its round coldness in the warm sweat of his palm. Curly Jack faced Gerrish, his body stiff and his chest arched. He was like a wild horse, head lifted and everything in him keen and alert and unafraid. He no longer smiled. His face showed Gerrish a dark affront.

"I gave it to the boy."

"Tell him why you can't keep it, Ben," said Gerrish, unbreakably courteous.

"I didn't earn it," said Ben.

Curly Jack moved his shoulders. "It was a gift. It was free."

"Nothing's free," answered Gerrish.

The expression of puzzled wonder again broke vaguely across Curly Jack's face. He stood still, as though searching for an answer to this

strangeness, and presently lifted the gold piece from young Ben's palm and wheeled away and young Ben rubbed his wet hands against his shirt, feeling the quick tap of his heart. But the dread left him. His father had stared back at Curly Jack's streaky eyes and his father's voice had been, for a moment, harder than Curly Jack's. He looked up at his father and was very proud.

The liver-colored pup came forward, all bones and skin and feet; he sat down at Ben's boots and his tail threshed the walk.

Young Ben said tentatively, "He doesn't belong to anybody, Father."

"Don't be late," repeated Gerrish and turned back to Lode. Young Ben watched him move away and observed that his father was a tall man; his shoulders were as big as Curly Jack's shoulders.

Young Ben tucked the pup under his arm and went on to the school. He left the pup at the foot of the steps and said, "Stay there."

Gerrish walked to his office. He paused at the door with his thoughts remaining on his son and presently he turned about and went up Stafford. When he stepped inside the house his wife came from the kitchen, startled because of this break in routine.

"What's wrong?"

"It's a dog that Ben wants. He has spoken of it before."

"A dog would be good for him."

He said, "I happen to know it is Poker Belle's dog. I'd have to make a bargain with her."

Mrs. Gerrish straightened her shoulders. "No. I don't want him to touch anything that belongs to Don Jaime Street. I hate that dirty, beastlike place. It has destroyed every decent thing in Dragoon. I lie awake thinking how vile an atmosphere young Ben walks through on the way to school—the fear and lust and degraded morals that reach out from that place and touch us all. How can we raise our children decently? It is like living on the edge of a swamp, deadly things crawling toward us, nearer and nearer. No, I don't want—"

"He has taken a fancy to that dog," said Gerrish gently.

She showed him the strain and dark worry she had never permitted her children to see. She watched him a long while and at last dropped her shoulders. "If you think best," she murmured and went back to the kitchen.

Gerrish returned down Stafford and walked directly to Poker Belle's house.

The sun moved west in the bluest, clearest of skies and heat began to press down through town and slowly the town livened. The solitary passenger from the Tucson stage strolled into the newspaper shop and introduced himself to Sam Gault.

"Name's Aaron Shotwell, member of Congress from New York state, member of the committee on public lands, touring the West."

"Honored," said Sam Gault, suppressing his habitual irony. "Take the least dusty chair, Congressman."

"So this is the Babylon of the desert—the wildest town between St. Louis and the Pueblo of Our Lady of the Angels?"

"Babylon," observed Sam Gault, "was a camp before my time. Still, I imagine Dragoon might spot it a few points and come out with the most balls in the rack."

"Seems quiet."

"Sin keeps late hours. Have you had

a drink lately, Congressman?"

"A man for breakfast," said the congressman. "Is that true?"

"Some mornings we're disappointed."

At four o'clock this afternoon the Louvre's professor had his breakfast of rye whisky and chile beans at the free-lunch counter and sat down to the piano to limber his fingers. Over at the Pavilion High-Pocket Bill scattered his wax flakes on the dance floor, and shades began to lift from second-story windows to let in a breath of day before it went away and those women whom Sam Gault referred to in his columns as "ladies of the hetaera" moved in casual promenade along the street. Don Jaime stirred from its long lethargy in preparation for the night.

A DUSTY man with a great hank of hair hanging below his hat brim rode in from the desert and pulled up at McSwain's watering-trough. While his horse drank, this rider rolled himself a cigarette, his eyes striking at the town from beneath the concealment of the hat brim. He put a match to the cigarette and his turning head stopped its motion when he found Curly Jack stationed idly by Lanahan's store. He looked upon Curly Jack with a complete blankness and turned the horse and loped out of Dragoon.

Curly Jack threw away his half-smoked cigar and chose a fresh one. Another man walked from McSwain's stable and stopped by. Curly Jack motioned at the disappearing rider.

"He'll go back to tell Doc Halliday I'm here. They'll be in tonight, Link."

"I'll go get the boys," said Link.

"Yes," said Curly Jack, the smile dancing in his eyes. From his place by Lanahan's he watched young Ben Gerrish come up Don Jaime from the school and turn to his father's office, the liver-colored pup close following. A six-horse team climbed out of Pedro Wash and stopped at the end of Border, a small crowd slowly drifting toward it. Sam Gault sauntered up Don Jaime and joined Curly Jack; the two of them walked to the wagon.

"That the piano?" asked Sam Gault.

"Yeah," said the teamster.

Curly Jack's cigar tilted upward between his teeth. He looked curiously at the thick mahogany legs, carved and bowed, showing beneath the protective tarps. "What piano?"

"Gerrish's," said Gault. "First piano in town. Civilization comes to Dragoon, Curly."

"Not the first," contradicted Curly Jack. "There's a piano in the Louvre."

"The Louvre's on Don Jaime Street, Curly. This is the first piano in a genteel home. You see the difference?"

"No," said Curly Jack. "What is the difference?"

"Sometime when I'm drunk," said Sam Gault, "I'll tell you. The universe is very clear to me then. Gentility is of the spirit, and I have to be drunk to speak of the spirit. Halliday comin' in tonight?"

"Maybe," said Curly Jack.

Gault said, "If you survive, look me up and we'll drink on your luck. If you die, I'll preach your sermon—because the minister won't."

He went away. Curly Jack watched the wagon and four horses go up Stafford Street with his eyes almost shut, reaching out to catch that one thing which had troubled him since morning.

Young Ben passed the freighting-office, saw his father beckon, and went in. "The dog," said his father, "belongs

to Poker Belle but she has no use for it. You are to carry twenty armloads of wood from her shed to her back porch. Then you may take the dog home."

"Yes, sir," said young Ben, and turned out. His father's voice called him back. "Ben," he said, "always do more than you promise. Make each armload a full one."

Young Ben went down Don Jaime Street with the liver-colored pup obediently behind, turned into a short alley, and came to Poker Belle's shed. It was fifty feet from shed to back porch and the twenty armloads, faithfully performed, took him an hour. There was an old piece of clothesline rope on the ground and this he tied around the liver-colored pup's neck. But the lessons of his father were all explicit, reminding him that nothing had been said about the rope; therefore he removed it and left it in the yard, tucked the pup under his arm, and returned home. The quitting whistles were blowing in the mines.

In his own shed behind the house, young Ben found another rope with which to tie the liver-colored pup. "Just for a few days, so you won't go back to Don Jaime."

He discovered a burlap sack and made a bed for the pup. He crouched down, tugging the pup's soft long ears; when he stretched them under the pup's jaws the ends touched. The pup edged nearer and his long tongue licked across young Ben's mouth. Young Ben's mother called him out of his deep preoccupation; he went into the house.

The new piano was a great, black-shining square of elegance under the light. His mother sat on the piano stool, her fingers running along the keys. She had her eyes shut. She pressed one key softly, and then her fingers formed a chord and she turned about and young Ben was astonished to see that she was near to crying.

His father moved over the room, smiling down. He said, "Like home, Rose?"

She said, "I'll teach Hope to play. I'll teach Ben." She was suddenly, terribly in earnest. "We must never let them forget anything."

AT EIGHT o'clock, night closed about Dragoon, soot-black, velvet-surfaced. Elsewhere the land lay empty, shadow and shadow pressing upon it, discreet in its mystery and beautiful, the formless edge of mountains shaped against lesser black. The stores on Lode were closed, presenting blank walls to the glitter of Don Jaime Street's saloons and dance halls.

On that short way men moved in errant waves from walk to walk; they batted through the swinging doors, their feet made a steady shuffle on the boards, their aimless traveling brought up the street's alkali dust. From the Pavilion rolled the steady melody of guitar and violin, the tramping of dancers, the call of voices and the sharp laughter of women.

Out of the night, up Border into Don Jaime, moved a steady procession of horsemen to populate this bright, glittering core of warmth. One man, early drunk, stood in the middle of the dust, swinging his arms around in destructive circles; somewhere a woman stridently cried and the music went on and a gun exploded and all this revelry was like the beat of blood in the jugular, echoing along Lode and dying against the withdrawn, distant life at the head of Stafford.

The night marshal came into the jail office on Border Street, fresh from sleep, and found the day marshal ready to be relieved. The night marshal was a slight, blond man with gray-green eyes, on whose dry face latent danger lay as a shadow.

He said, "Anything new?"

"Curly Jack's in town. Doc Halliday just arrived. Both got some boys with them."

"So," said the night marshal. He took pains with his cigar; he strapped on his gun. "That's been comin' a long while."

"You want me to hang around?"

"No," said the night marshal.

The day marshal turned out of the office. The night marshal lifted and dropped the gun in its holster to test it, gave himself a short glance in the wall mirror, and stepped into the street. Coming to Don Jaime, he had his practiced look at the crowd, saw the things that needed to be seen, and set out on his nightly rounds.

In his room at the hotel the congressman poured a pair of drinks, one for himself and one for Sam Gault. He stood at the window, viewing the sullen shining of light on Don Jaime and the dust rising like clouds of brimstone and sulphur around the moving mass of men. The tremor of Don Jaime, its shrill echoes and its growling undertone, came through the window at him.

"Nothing," said the congressman, being half drunk and very clear of head, "could be like that. It is a scene out of Dante, upon my soul. In a town like this not one decent thing could thrive, no kind impulse take root."

"Congressman," said Sam Gault, "you travel with good whisky. Let me have that bottle."

CURLY JACK crossed Don Jaime, moving men aside with a push of his shoulder, and stopped in the alley shadows beside the Pavilion. He searched Don Jaime with his glance, close watching the double shadow of two men standing at the Louvre corner. Somebody moved past the Pavilion and paused by the alley's mouth, murmuring, "Halliday's in Kilrain's place—he's standing at the bar," and moved on into the crowd.

Curly Jack went along the alley to a side door of the Pavilion and opened it; he stood against the wall until Poker Belle left her partner on the floor and came obediently to him, sequins glittering around the low-cut front of her dress, her skin white against piled-up black hair.

He said irritably, "Come on," and led her into the alley.

"What's up, Jack?"

He didn't answer. They walked side by side through the alley, turned across Lode at its dark end, and moved out toward the low hill behind town.

She said, "Halliday's in town. Curly, I wish—"

They were at the head of Stafford; they were in the shadows, looking across the width of a thirty-foot street whose width was a bay and on whose far shore the houses of the genteel showed strange and distant lights.

"A funny thing," he said. "You can't hear Don Jaime Street when you're standing here."

"Let's go back."

He faced the Gerrish house and was long silent, struggling with his wonder, annoyed by it but held by it. A young couple moved in from the edges of town—Neal Curzon and Hope Gerrish—walking arm and arm. They stood by the porch, softly laughing and gent-

ly whispering, and passed into the house.

"Listen," said Curly Jack. "That piano."

"There's a piano in the Louvre, Curly. Let's go back."

"I do what I please in this country, Belle. I can make a man smile and I can make him beg. Nobody in this town has got nerve enough to touch me. I could turn Don Jaime Street inside out if I wanted. But those people in that house—they don't know I'm alive. Why's that, Belle?"

"Come on," she said. "We don't belong here."

"Why not?" he said, in a resentful voice. "I walk where I please. Nobody stops me. Why not?"

But she pulled him around into Stafford. At the corner of Lode he stopped, looking across at the mouth of McSwain's stable.

He said, "Go on, old girl. I'll see you later."

She took his arm, her strong perfume rising to him. Her shoulders lifted and her face in these shadows was pale. She was a big and emotional woman but she held back her feelings, as she had learned to do, and turned across Lode to Don Jaime.

He had seen the blur of motion in McSwain's. He moved over Lode and threaded an alley and arrived at a side door of Kilrain's saloon. He opened the door and looked in. Halliday had been here but Halliday was gone and so now he retreated and ducked along the rear alleys to Border and entered Don Jaime from the lower end.

Light touched him briefly as he moved forward through the crowd; it flashed against his eyes and showed the faint sweat damp on his face. He passed the night marshal and said, "Hello, George," and came to the head of Don Jaime and crossed to Lanahan's. He placed his back to the store, watching Don Jaime. In a few minutes he was tired of waiting and moved to Stafford again, going along it toward the Gerrish house—impelled by the puzzle that wouldn't leave him.

He had his left flank close against the side of a building. He watched his right—the darkness over there and the break of building walls. The voice, when it arrived, shocked him immeasurably.

"Hello, Curly."

He wheeled full around, seeing nothing. He wheeled again and froze when he heard laughter above him and looked up to see shoulders poked half through the second-story window of the butcher shop. He heard the voice again, Halliday's cool and provoking voice: "So long, Curly," and as he drew his gun in one futile motion Halliday's bullet tore through his chest and dropped him.

The noise of Don Jaime Street came forward in faint murmuring waves. The gun's echo ran on and on and died in the silence beyond town. Chest down on the walk, he heard Halliday's boots rattle through the butcher shop and fade. After that he was alone.

He turned on his side and he pushed himself to his knees, facing the head of Stafford; from this position he saw the lights of the Gerrish house shining out and he heard the tinkle of the piano. Someone ran toward him with a gasping breath and in a moment Poker Belle's big warm arms enclosed him.

"Curly, why did you let him—!"

"Listen, Belle. Hear that piano?"

"It's from the Louvre, Curly."

"Louvre piano never sounded like

that, Belle."

"What you want, Curly?"

"Why don't they stop that damned piano. I'm out here. I'm dying. Don't they know that?"

"Curly," she said, and watched his head bob down. She sat in the dust, this heavy woman, with her bare shoulders bowed over a dead man, crying and saying things to him he had never heard while alive. Nobody came along. She was alone in the shadows of Stafford Street.

MRS. GERRISH sat before the piano, thinking of tunes she had played as a young girl in the East. A single shot broke on Stafford somewhere, its echo creeping through the house wall. She sat still, rigid inside, and presently turned—holding dread out of her eyes.

Neal Curzon and Hope sat on the sofa, alternately taking turns at the stereopticon; she saw them touch hands as though by accident, and look at each other with an absorption that made nothing else important. Young Ben sat on the floor with the pup spraddled on his lap. He rubbed his hand down the pup's silk ears and his face was held in its dream. They had not heard the shot.

Looking across to her husband, she caught his nod, and turned back to the piano, relieved. Inside the four walls of this house Don Jaime Street was only an echo which meant nothing.

THE OLD DUPREE TRAIL

By E. C. Scheel

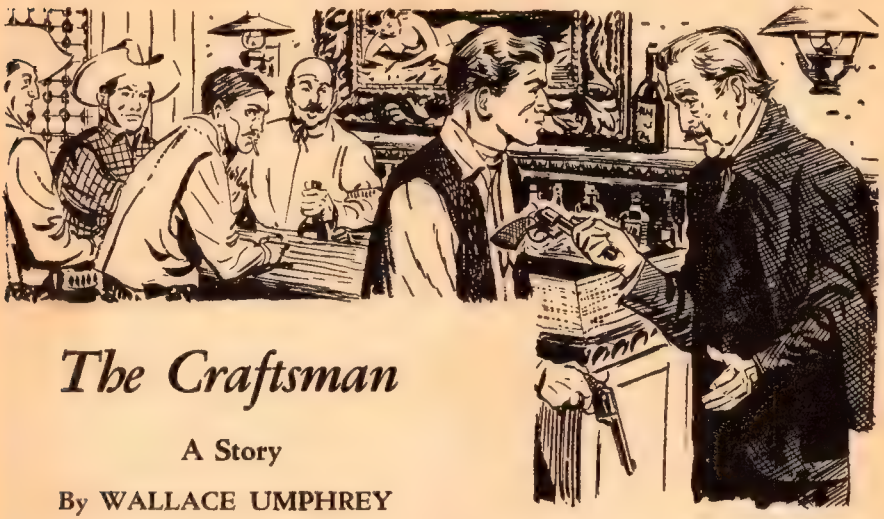
GHOST FINGERS creep across the prairie floor,
And twist and turn up ridge and vale;
Pick threads of old forgotten warp and woof
And weave them into winding trail.

Eyes, socketless, deep-sunken, stare ahead,
And seem to see long wagon trains
Crawl slowly up its dusty, rutty length—
Then disappear on lonely plains.

Ghost-soul, earth-tired, relives the olden pain
That smacks of joy; adventure rare!
Wolves, coyotes, skulk along the edge of night
And fling lone requiems into air.

Ruts, worn and dim, are scarred by fence and field;
Lost trail, once king of trails, returns
Freight-lined, between Fort Pierre and old Dupree,
A living thing—when ghost-fire burns.

Embittered by his own life's pattern, Dave Worrell plans to shape the destiny of others—and finds that pride may serve to keep a man from trying to play God.



The Craftsman

A Story

By WALLACE UMPHREY

DAVE WORRELL, gunsmith, a somber man in whose face the past had etched deep lines, sat on the three-legged stool in front of his workbench, restless hands now quiet, Jude Keller's revolver lying in the lap of his grease-stained deerskin apron.

Beyond in the sitting-room he could hear Cathy practicing on the reed organ. He listened carefully, not really trying to recognize what was being played, yet concentrating on it, hoping the sweet tinkling notes might start his hands working again.

The reed organ was suddenly still. In the massed silence Dave Worrell heard the deep faraway rumble of a freight wagon, linch pins rattling, the clumsy wooden yokes clicking against the horns of the oxen. He turned his thick body on the three-legged stool to look into the sitting-room, seeing Cathy sitting gracefully on the fringed red bench in front of the reed organ, her dainty feet motionless on the carpeted pedals. She made him think of Sabina, in that moment, and of a promise he had made.

Cathy met his gaze, carefree and gay. And unconsciously Dave Worrell's hand tightened on the cedar grip of Jude Keller's revolver lying in his lap.

"What was that you were playing?" he called out.

She laughed. "You never remember anything."

The trouble, Dave Worrell thought, was that he remembered too much. He looked away, out past the muslin curtains at the sun-baked red earth of the plaza. Opposite was Tige Camferman's Livery Stable and Corral, then the Palace Dance Hall, John Senstrom's hide-and-wool warehouse, the Las Cruces House, Lex Prager's Saloon, while next to that was the small white-washed church with the parsonage close beside it.

Richie Singer, young enough to be

Dave Worrell's own son, a tall, fair young man with a gun swinging free at his hip and a bright marshal's star pinned to his cowhide vest, walked swiftly along the adobe wall of the corral across the square. Shading his eyes with one hand, he broke his stride long enough to look across at Dave Worrell's small house-and-shop. Then he resumed his patrol of the town.

Cathy said with petulant disappointment, "Richie didn't even wave to me."

Dave glanced up to see her standing beside him, slim and young and lovely.

"The sun was in his eyes."

"He might have stopped by," Cathy murmured. "I hardly ever see him."

"He's a lawman," Dave said, the past piled in thick layers around him. "Richie believes in working at his job. After tomorrow night you'll be seeing a lot of him."

Cathy blushed, laughing with soft pleasure, and rumpled her father's silver-powdered hair. A little silver bell tinkled as the door of the shop was pushed open. Cathy bent quickly to kiss her father's forehead, then skipped back to the sitting-room, pulling the heavy folds of the beaded drapes across the opening.

"Howdy, Dave," Anse Bullard said. "Just this minute got in from St. Looey with the wagons. Cathy's purty as a picture. She'll make Richie Singer a good wife."

"Yes," Dave Worrell said.

Anse Bullard, a small, erect man with pale eyes and a ragged mustache, was an armed guard on John Senstrom's freight wagons. He had paused to wash his face and hands, but trail dust still clung thickly to his hair and clothing. He clapped Dave Worrell on the back.

"You got my rifle fixed up, Dave?"

Dave pushed aside the chisels and rasps, the bits of emory cloth, the screwdrivers and mallets that littered the workbench. Carefully he placed Jude Keller's revolver in the middle of the cleared space. Then he pulled himself to his feet, one hand on top of the small foot lathe, the other on the frame of a big grinding wheel. He limped to the buffalo-horn rack and took down a polished rifle, reaching up with his left hand to do it.

"It's okay now?" Bullard asked.

"Take my word for it," Dave said. "I've never yet sent a gun out of here that wasn't right."

Anse Bullard grinned faintly, caressing the gleaming barrel. "Shouldn't have even asked, Dave." He moved to the window and threw the rifle to his shoulder, his ragged mustache touching the stock, his pale eyes squinting down along the barrel. Without turning his head he asked, "How's the arm today?"

"All right," Dave said.

Bullard chuckled. "That means it won't rain, anyways." He lowered the rifle, then snapped it to his shoulder again. "Curtains! Now ain't that like a woman?" He brushed aside the muslin curtains and took an imaginary bead. "There's Ben Keller across the square talkin' to Tige Camferman. Lawdy! Got him plumb center in my sights."

Dave Worrell, seated again on the three-legged stool, looked down at his quiet hands. "You couldn't miss, Anse."

Anse Bullard chuckled once more, but this time without real meaning.

"Heard that Jude Keller was talkin' big again last night, Dave. Says this here town ain't big enough for both him and Richie Singer." Bullard turned now, suddenly cheerful. "How much for this here job, Dave?" he asked,

fondly patting the rifle stock.

After Anse Bullard was gone, Dave Worrell sat there thinking. He wished his hands would start working again. He lifted his right arm as far as it would go, shoulder-high, then let the muscles go lax all at once so that the arm dropped down of its own deadweight, banging hard against a knee from which most of the feeling had long since departed.

Richie Singer came in, hatless, face a little weary, light hair curling damply from the brassy heat outside. He glanced at the closed drapes of the sitting-room, then leaned against the wall, wiping his young face with a bandanna handkerchief.

"Hot." He put away the bandanna and lowered his voice. "Just came up from Senstrom's—" He spoke in the tone of a conspirator. "The rosewood melodeon got here with the wagons from St. Louis. Mr. Worrell," he asked, suddenly worried, "you reckon Cathy will like it?"

"She'll like it," Dave said. "That's the one thing she'd miss the most when she moves into a place of her own."

The frown lifted from Richie Singer's face. He glanced again at the beaded green drapes, eagerness coming into his eyes. Dave said quickly:

"Just a minute, Richie. You made up your mind yet?"

Richie Singer's gaze was level. "Slept on it last night, Mr. Worrell. Didn't sleep much a-tall. Reckon I just can't face the town council and turn in my badge."

"Why not?"

"No reason. It's a thing I can't understand. Just can't do it, Mr. Worrell."

"Maybe," Dave said, "it's because youth is full of a stubborn foolish pride."

"Maybe," Richie Singer agreed.

Dave dropped his glance, wishing his hands would start doing something instead of just lying quietly in his lap. "There are other jobs, Richie. Folks would understand. There's a chance to get on at Senstrom's. Being marshal is a job for a single man."

"Cathy knows the chances."

"Cathy doesn't know a thing about it. She's too young—too much in love to understand."

Richie Singer said pointedly, "You were just about my age, Mr. Worrell. You were the marshal then. And you got married."

Dave Worrell thought about Sabina. "She made me promise," he murmured, "that no unhappiness would befall Cathy. She made me promise it, Richie." He was still looking down at his hands. "Is Ben Keller still across there with Tige Camferman?"

Richie Singer went to the window. "Still there."

"The Kellers," Dave Worrell said, his mind focused mostly on the past, "have been here too long. They still think they own the country. It's Keller law or no law at all. Jude Keller doesn't hate you, Richie—he hates only the badge you wear. Ben Keller raised him that way.

"It had to come that time, Richie," Dave went on, and now the past alone was in his mind. "Right out there in the square. It was dusk and you can still see the bullet gouges in the adobe wall of Tige Camferman's corral. My gun jammed. I didn't get a shot away. Ben Keller emptied his revolver, and most of his shots didn't miss."

Dave Worrell touched the right arm he couldn't lift beyond shoulder height,

then looked down at his almost-useless leg. "Maybe Ben Keller was the better shot. He always claimed so. Now that's a thing I'll never know."

Richie Singer said helplessly, "I'm sorry."

Dave said, "Still time to think it over."

Embarrassment hung in Richie Singer's young eyes. He stepped forward, touching Dave Worrell's shoulder in a gesture of warmth although not in understanding. His eyes strayed toward the workbench where Jude Keller's revolver lay.

"That's Jude's gun," Richie Singer said. "You got it oiled up and ready to go?"

Dave found his tongue thick, speech coming sluggishly like the flow of oil on a cold day.

"It's ready," he replied.

Richie Singer straightened. "I'm not afraid of Jude Keller, if that's what you think. I'm not sure I can outdraw him, but I'm not scared to find out."

"I know."

"Life doesn't follow a pattern, Mr. Worrell. It doesn't have to happen the same way again." Richie Singer smiled faintly. "Reckon Cathy might find me a cool drink of water someplace?"

"Go on in, Richie," Dave said in defeat. "She'll want to see you."

He sat there, staring down at Jude Keller's gun, his hands still refusing to do anything except lie uselessly in his lap. A lawman was either with the Kellers or against them—there could be no other way The Keller Ranch, managed now by Jude Keller, was a vast expanse of grassland rolling to the horizon and beyond, so big that a man riding hard all day couldn't reach the limit. Jude Keller, as his father before him had done, made the laws which the cowboys riding for the Keller iron followed to the letter. That these laws might clash with other laws was of no import. The Kellers possessed fierce loyalties and fierce prides, and their cowboys rode into town with Keller-given dispensations. A marshal had a choice to make. Richie Singer had made his.

The silver bell jangled. Dave Worrell turned and then tried to rise, but in that moment his leg failed him and he sank exhausted to the three-legged stool. Ben Keller strode forward, the years riding light on his shoulders, a big rawboned man with a dark hawk-like face and mocking eyes.

"I came to get my boy's gun," he said.

"Tell your boy," Dave Worrell said, conscious of his hands lying quietly in his lap, "to leave Richie Singer alone."

Ben Keller smiled. "I'll take the gun now."

The beaded green curtains parted and Richie Singer stepped out. Then he halted, the gun swinging free at his hip, the marshal's badge gleaming on his cowhide vest. Gaze level, he looked at Ben Keller. Keller's glance was sardonic, and Richie Singer flushed. No word passed between them, no outward sign, but words and signs at this time were unnecessary.

"See you later, Mr. Worrell," Richie Singer said, and then quickly departed.

Dave faced Keller. "Tell Jude to leave him alone."

Ben Keller said, "Richie Singer can always quit."

Dave sat quietly, staring down at the tools that had so long been a part of him. His hands began to itch. Ben Keller stepped past him to pick up the revolver himself, but Dave Worrell's

fingers closed like a vise around his wrist.

"Jude's gun," Dave found himself saying, "isn't ready yet."

"When?" Ben Keller asked.

"Tomorrow," Dave said.

Ben Keller nodded and went out. The jangle of the bell died slowly, leaving only empty silence. Cathy came through the beaded green drapes.

"I've been listening," she said.

"What does Richie say?"

Cathy's small chin lifted proudly. "I'll never ask him to hand in the badge. I believe in the marriage vows, and I'll take him for better or for worse. There are things," she said simply, "that a wife can never ask of her husband. One of them is to take away his pride."

"You don't understand," Dave said.

"There are things," Cathy said defiantly, "that you don't have to understand."

"No," Dave said.

Color had come into Cathy's cheeks. Head high, she stepped back into the sitting-room. Dave Worrell watched the green drapes until they hung still and lifeless. Then he turned back to the workbench, Jude Keller's revolver staring back at him as mockingly as Ben Keller's glance. Dave Worrell's hands began to itch, worse now than before, suddenly restless, suddenly eager to start work. . . .

"They say," Cathy was murmuring, looking out of the parsonage window, "that the church looks lovely. One of Mr. Senstrom's wagons stopped in the mountains for a load of fresh pine boughs. Mr. Pedley had the organ repaired. I haven't seen the flowers—"

Dave Worrell's mind was elsewhere, outside in the street of the town. He was listening for some obscure sound that he didn't want to hear, not knowing when or where or how it would come, only certain it must be there somewhere waiting to be heard. He was dressed in a tight black suit with a black broadcloth cape flung over his thick shoulders.

"What time is it?" Richie asked.

Dave was startled, the words disturbing the utter concentration of his mind. He fumbled for his big gold watch, at the same time glancing at Richie Singer. It came to him that Richie looked strange without a gun at his hip.

"Almost seven," Dave said, pocketing the watch. "Only fifteen minutes more."

Cathy came away from the window. "The guests are arriving. Mr. and Mrs. Prager just went in." She touched her father's hand. "You're cold. Better sit down and rest." She urged him into a big post-oak chair. "Are you sure you remember just what to do? It would be just like you to get everything wrong."

Dave Worrell's hands were restless and there was nothing he could do with them. Fifteen minutes. It would be better if he could only hear the sounds that must be gathering in the dusk outside. He glanced at Cathy and remembered Sabina, at the same time appreciating how young and lovely Cathy looked in her white cotton-lace wedding dress with its tight bodice and full gored skirt.

A knock came on the parsonage door. Dave stiffened, thinking that this might be it. But it was Anse Bullard who came inside, his mustache trimmed for the wedding.

"How you makin' out, Richie?" Anse asked.

Richie grinned. "Feel like I got a mighty big painter by the tail."

Anse Bullard came to a halt beside the post-oak chair where Dave Worrell sat, his eyes straying around the room but not really looking at anything and not wanting to.

"Jude Keller's in town," he said, his face troubled. "Ben Keller's with him. Jude's got his gun." Anse Bullard coughed, covering his mouth with a tanned hand. "Some of their cowboys are with 'em, too, but they ain't bent on trouble."

Dave glanced quickly at Richie, trying to trap him in some secret fear. But Richie Singer's face was without expression. Dave's glance moved on to Cathy, seeing something smoldering behind the skin and bones of her face. Anse Bullard began backing self-consciously toward the door, as if he suddenly found himself in a strange and somewhat terrifying place.

"Only reckoned you ought to know," he said.

Mr. Pedley, the minister, bustled inside, looking behind and saying something unimportant to Anse Bullard in the doorway. The minister shut the door and then shared a brief smile with all of them left in the room. A tall, gaunt, stooped man wearing steel-rimmed spectacles, Mr. Pedley looked a little harried by the affair that was soon to take place in his church.

"It's just about time," Mr. Pedley said. "The church—"

Dave was listening intently. "There's somebody else at the door."

When Mr. Pedley opened the door, Ben Keller's fist was just lifted to knock. Ben Keller lowered his arm slowly, rubbing his fist with the other hand and letting his gaze rake the room. With a measured tread he came inside, his glance centered now on Richie Singer.

"Jude would like to see you now, Richie," Ben Keller said. "He's down at Prager's Saloon. You'll need time to fetch your gun belt. Let's make it ten minutes."

Richie Singer's mouth was hard. "Ten minutes."

"No," Dave Worrell said.

Richie Singer looked at him. "The thing can't be helped, Mr. Worrell."

Dave glanced at Cathy. The tight bodice of her white cotton-lace wedding dress was fluttering, but she uttered no sound. Mr. Pedley was wringing his hands.

"I don't understand," he said.

"Some things you don't have to understand, Mr. Pedley." Ben Keller was still facing Richie Singer. "You will come down the street from the west. Jude will meet you in front of Tige Camferman's Livery Stable. It's getting dark, so both of you will wait until you're close—maybe thirty feet. Jude wanted this over before the marriage took place. Is this agreeable?"

"Yes," Richie Singer said.

Dave Worrell whispered, "No."

Richie Singer turned gravely. "A man does what he has to do, Mr. Worrell. And he does it the best way he knows how."

Ben Keller stalked quietly out, leaving the door open behind him. Dave Worrell sat without moving. Richie touched Cathy's hand and then squeezed it, and a look shared by no one else passed between them. Then he was gone.

Dave Worrell could move now. For a moment he sat there in the post-oak chair, straining forward, his hands restless and his mind alive. He thought of Sabina, and of that other time so

long ago.

"I tried," he said aloud. "It's something I can't do."

Mr. Pedley was startled. "What?"

"A man," Dave said, rising, "should never do less than his best."

He limped swiftly from the parsonage, making his way toward his own shop. He didn't bother lighting a lamp, since unerring familiarity made much light unnecessary. A moment later he let himself out into the plaza, carrying a revolver wrapped in an oily rag, and limped swiftly toward Prager's Saloon.

Jude Keller stood waiting just inside the doorway, his young body alert and his eyes sooty in his dark face. The cowboys from the Keller Ranch were behind him, spread out along the bar, and they eyed Dave Worrell in stony silence.

Dave said, "Give me your gun, Jude."

Jude Keller said thinly, "It's not that easy."

"Your father picked up your gun today," Dave Worrell said. "I made a mistake. It wasn't ready."

Their eyes met and locked. Jude Keller jerked out his gun, balancing it on his palm. His eyes never shifted from Dave Worrell's face.

Dave wiped the oil from the gun he had carried from his shop. "You won't be used to this gun, Jude. But it won't matter. At thirty feet nothing much matters so long as your gun doesn't jam." Dave Worrell's hands moved restlessly. "This is my gun, Jude. It's in good shape. This time it won't fail." He hesitated. "I won't wish you luck."

"Why are you doing this?" Jude Keller asked.

"Pride, maybe," Dave Worrell said. "And maybe a man should never play at being God."

Dave Worrell limped into the parsonage, carefully shutting the door behind him, then crossed over to the post-oak chair and seated himself. Cathy was paler now, all emotion still held in abeyance. Mr. Pedley was clasping a Bible in his two hands. It was very quiet now.

"A terrible thing," Mr. Pedley said.

Cathy sobbed once and fled toward her father, kneeling in front of him with her head down in her hands. Her shoulders shook, but she cried without a sound. Mr. Pedley dropped to one knee, the Bible clasped to his chest, and bent his head in prayer. Dave Worrell put out a hand, touching Cathy's soft dark hair, remembering Sabina and a promise he had made which was not within his power to keep.

"I don't understand," he murmured.

The street outside was still quiet. When he had walked back to the parsonage, Dave Worrell had seen a few people standing on the steps of the church. There would be more now, watching in silence from the walks. Ten minutes. Richie Singer must have his gun belt buckled now, the gun swinging free. He must be waiting for some signal to start him on his slow, measured walk toward Tige Camferman's Livery Stable.

Dave Worrell knew how it was. The twilight haze dulls your perception and the thin red dust spurts up from the toes of your boots and the buildings seem to lean crazily out to form an arch over the street. You walk slowly, your tread a different tempo from the pulse hammering in your throat. A man walks toward you, a man you have never seen before. You are aware of passing faceless people who line the walks. The unknown man is a long

way off but he is getting closer with each beat of your heart, and you tell yourself that here is someone to be shot and killed.

Your face is damp and your hands are damp and your arms and hands and fingers are sticks of wood. It all seems senseless, but now it is too late. You don't think you are afraid. Now you are close to the unknown man, and suddenly you recognize him for somebody you have known for a long time. You don't want to kill him, but it is too late to back out now.

You stop and he stops. Time stops, too. An eternity slips past and you stand there, crouching a little, waiting, wondering what is showing in your eyes. There is no signal but you will know when it must happen. And then time starts again and your hand is driving down for the gun at your hip and nothing is real in the world except yourself and the man you must kill—

The shots sounded loud in Dave Worrell's ears, five of them, fast yet evenly spaced, and they served to shatter the bonds of silence that had held the town. Voices lifted outside. Mr. Pedley raised his head, his prayer forgotten. Cathy seemed frozen.

"I never got a chance to find out," Dave Worrell found himself saying. "Maybe I've suffered all these years because I never had a chance to know."

"Richie's all right," Cathy said into her hands.

"Yes," Dave Worrell said remotely.

The door opened suddenly, banging back against its hinges, and Richie Singer stepped inside. His gun belt was still strapped around his waist, his gun held down along his side. His jaw was white and ridged, his eyes looked blank and empty.

Cathy gave a strangled cry and then she was in his arms.

"Jude's hit bad," Richie said to Dave Worrell, staring over Cathy's shoulder. "The doc's with him now. Maybe he'll pull out of it. I tried to kill him."

"Yes," Dave Worrell said.

"I had to try to kill him," Richie Singer said.

Dave Worrell nodded. "How about you?"

Richie Singer stepped back, poking a finger at the hole in his sleeve. "Close. Not close enough. I got him twice."

"Twice," Dave Worrell murmured.

Richie Singer holstered his revolver and then unbuckled his gun belt, placing it carefully on the seat of a chair. Life slipped quickly into his eyes.

Dave Worrell rose. Mr. Pedley was clasping his Bible. A shadow crouched in Cathy's eyes. Dave looked at Richie Singer and saw himself standing there. A man has to do some things without understanding the reason, Dave Worrell thought. Things that have to do with pride and with being a man.

Doubt was suddenly gone from Dave Worrell's mind. With a deep inner conviction he said, "You'll go on being a lawman, Richie. The badge means something. If I'd been able, it's what I would have done."

Richey Singer nodded. "No use asking why. A man has to do what he thinks is right."

Mr. Pedley managed a smile.

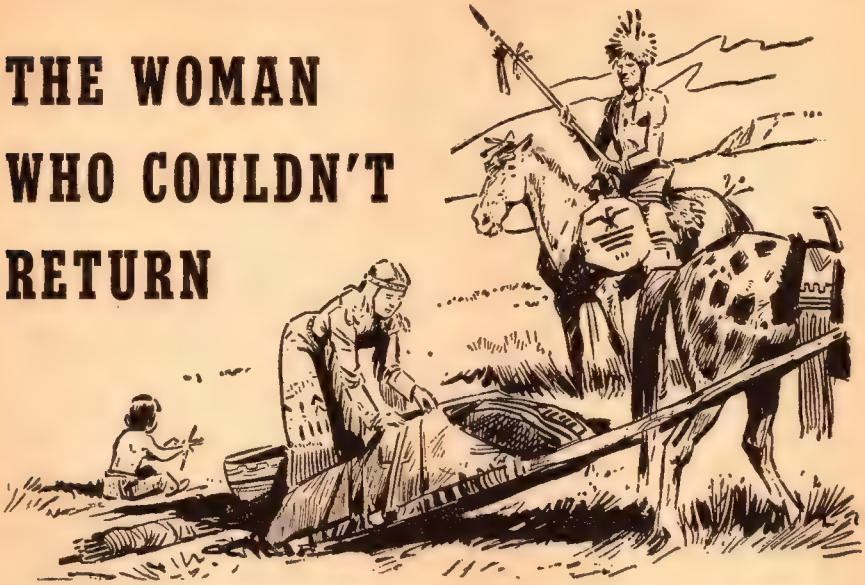
"Shall we continue with the ceremony now?"

Cathy was suddenly serene, staring up at Richie Singer with shining eyes. She brushed a spot of dust from his sleeve, her fingers halting only momentarily over the bullet hole.

"Of course, Mr. Pedley," she said.

A Strange True Story of the Old West by W. H. Hutchinson

THE WOMAN WHO COULDN'T RETURN



THE settlers called it Parker's Fort in the Year of our Lord Eighteen Hundred and Thirty-Six, and of the Independence of Texas the first month. It seems a high-sounding name for the collection of dog-trot houses, outbuildings, and the rest that lay along the west side of Navasota Creek, where Groesbeck, county seat of Limestone County, stands today. But Parker's Fort was an outpost of civilization, sitting on the northernmost rim of Texas penetration toward the vast ocean of grass where the buffalo and the antelope roamed as free as the wind, where the wild warriors on their painted ponies lived by the buffalo and by war.

To borrow a modern phrase, Parker's Fort was a dagger pointed at the very heart of *Comanchería*, a rallying point for the scattered settlers between the Brazos and the Trinity. It was, also, home and hearth to Silas M. Parker, his wife and family, who lay down to sleep on the night of May 18, 1836, together with their neighbors inside the settlement, secure in the knowledge that Sam Houston had freed them from the tyranny of Santa Anna a scant thirty days before.

Perhaps their new-won freedom had made them careless, perhaps years of living on the very knife edge of the frontier had dulled their sense of danger. Whatever the reasons, the morning sun of May 19, 1836, looked down on a confused shambles that had been Parker's Fort—a messy slaughterhouse of bed-tick feathers, twisted bodies, and the ashes of burned possessions.

The Comanches had come and gone. With them went the loot of Parker's Fort, including those inhabitants who had survived the first red fury and were useful for Comanche purposes. The roster of the captives, as deduced from the visible dead, included Mrs. Elizabeth Kellogg; Mrs. Rachel Plum-

mer and her fifteen-months-old son; and a small, blond girl about nine years of age named Cynthia Ann Parker.

Parker's Fort became another red entry in the ledger of frontier settlement. The timeless silence of the Plains shut down like a curtain upon the marauders and their captives. The curtain might have stayed unpierced for years, or forever, had not the Comanches been what they were.

Some tribes made war for honor, some for glory, some because they hated white skin, some just because they wanted to. The Comanches were addicted to the profit motive, and made no bones about it. Years of experience, playing the colonial governments of France and Spain against one another, raiding Mexico and selling the loot to New Mexicans, had shown them that war was a lucrative business. When Stephen Austin's colonists came to Texas, they had soon learned the ransom racket for women and children, and the value of "go-betweens."

Mrs. Kellogg showed up at Nacogdoches, shepherded by some wandering Delawares who asked and got $150 for her return to civilization. Mrs. Plummer and her son were ransomed through the good offices of some *Comancheros*, New Mexican traders engaged in the illicit commerce of the prairies. But of Cynthia Ann Parker, *silencio!*

High up on the Staked Plains, in one of the pleasant, grassy, tree-shaded oases along the Canadian River, three men, two Texans and one Delaware, visited a camp of Kwahari Comanches in the year 1840. A light-skinned, blue-eyed, slender girl caught their eye and, with the Comanches' consent, they talked to her. She was Cynthia Ann Parker, but she was not for ransom; some say by edict of Pahaka, chief of the Kwahari, some say even then by her own volition. It is no matter which. The white men did their trading and went their way, and carried the word back to Texas that Cynthia Ann still lived, apparently well and happy.

In 1855, nineteen long years after Parker's Fort, Victor Rose led a band of white hunters out onto the Plains, and wandered across a band of Nokoni Comanches. The memory of Cynthia Ann Parker came alive again, even though the years had made a difference in her.

She was now a woman of twenty-eight, indistinguishable from the other women of the Nokoni save by her golden-tanned skin, her blue eyes, and the light hair that was her heritage. Her mother tongue came creakingly from her lips and while she talked freely about her present life, she seemed unable or unwilling to recall what her life had been before that night she was raided out of her father's house. All this could be accounted for on the basis of nineteen years spent in a Comanche environment. But the great difference the years had wrought became apparent when Rose suggested that she return to Texas with him and his men for protection. She did not cotton to this suggestion. And why should she?

Her life was on the Plains with her people, the Comanches, with her husband, Peta Nokoni, famous warrior and leader of the band that bore his name, and with her son, now almost ten years old. Rose and his men shoved off into the sea of grass, leaving *Palux*, née Cynthia Ann Parker, now wife of Peta Nokoni, and her family to follow

the Comanche way of life.

Looking backward from the comfortable cotton-batting built up by the progress of the years since Parker's Fort, it may seem passing strange that Cynthia Ann chose to stay with her adopted life. The frontier white woman worked harder than seems credible today, but her Indian counterpart had a life of unmitigated and unrelieved drudgery. Skinning game, butchering the meat, dressing the skins, cutting wood, packing water, cooking, gathering chips or the bitter *chittam* berries, making garments, cobbling moccasins, cooking, raising children—every detail of camp life was work, and the week held seven days.

Breaking camp was even worse, for the women did the packing on the *travois* poles, and the women set up the lodge again when a new camp was made. This was routine, but even among the restless, roving Comanches, the Nokoni band were distinguished; their name meant "bad campers," meaning that they seldom stayed long in one place.

The life, too, involved the threat of war parties raiding the Comanches, just as the Comanches raided anyone else with something to be appropriated. Battle and sudden death were occupational hazards of the warriors. Even in the hunt, running buffalo for meat, thrusting the long lance just behind the shoulder of the plunging animal that weighed a ton on the hoof and letting the hunter's weight and speed ride it home, violent death by accident was commonplace. And the Comanche had no "welfare state" for the women and children of a departed warrior.

It was a hard life, as cruel as the "blue northers" that swept the Plains in winter, as pitiless as the mid-summer sun that baked the eyeballs in their sockets. But it was a free life, too, and something in it spoke directly to the girl once named Cynthia Ann Parker, herself descended from the wandering adventurers who had pushed the American frontier across the Blue Ridge into Kentucky's Dark and Bloody Ground, then pushed it on and on and on, questing always for the land where the sun went down.

It was a hard life, and a free one. It was, also, a life where the family worked together against the known, simple, elemental hazards of weather and human enemies. It was a life where a woman knew what her husband did to support his family, which is more than many know today. And no life is too hard to overcome the truth of old sayings, sayings that have a curled-lip service today: *Home is where the heart is*, or *Who finds freedom finds his country*. Above and beyond these obvious aspects, pro and con, of the life she loved, there is no explaining what rests in a woman's heart. Cynthia Ann Parker loved her life, her husband, and her family, of this there is no doubt, for just five years after Victor Rose visited the Nokoni camp, her life with her family came to an end.

Late in November, 1860, a war party of Kiowas and Comanches swept out of the Plains into Texas on a last raid before winter froze them into immobility. Passing west of Jacksboro, penetrating almost to Weatherford, the raiders swung north and west again for open country, leaving twenty-three dead settlers behind them and taking one hundred and fifty horses with them. The country roused itself to the seemingly never-ending task of teaching the marauders of the Plains

that it didn't pay to mess with Texans.

Some seventy settlers, under Jack Cureton, a grizzled, salty dog of the frontier, gathered near Fort Belknap to avenge their dead. Captain L. S. ("Sul") Ross, with forty-seven Texas Rangers, joined them on December 13, 1860, and this same day, twenty-three U. S. Dragoons, from the Second Cavalry, under Sergeant Spangler, joined them. The expeditionary force jumped off, 140 strong, with Charles Goodnight, later famous for his status and stature as a cattleman, for scout and guide.

Following the trail of the war party, now two weeks old, the command shivered through the bitter December days and cooked their meager rations each night over frugal fires. Forging steadily north and west of Belknap, they camped on the south side of Pease River, well up toward the Cap Rock of the Plains, on the night of December 18, 1860, and they were on fresh Indian sign.

Next morning early, the expedition broke camp. Ross's Rangers got away first, followed by the Dragoons. Cureton's settlers came last, taking longer to break camp than the better organized professionals. Jogging steadily up the south bank of the river, the Rangers topped a little sand hill.

There below them, where the sweet water of Mule Creek entered the "gyp" flow of the Pease, was a small Comanche camp with the lodges down and packed on the horses in readiness to move, though apparently not from any thought that Nemesis was near. Sul Ross simply kicked his horse into a run, the Rangers and Dragoons poured after him, Cureton's settlers came pell-mell along the trail, and the fight was on.

The fight was short and, to the white men, sweet. The Comanches were surprised, and the less than a dozen warriors somewhat outnumbered. They tried to stand and fight, thus giving their women a chance to get the camp gear away, but it was no use. The Rangers poured right through the women and the laden, plunging, squealing horses and took after the warriors, cutting them down in hand-to-hand, killing them to the last man, discovering just in time that one of the "warriors," riding a good gray horse, was in reality a woman with an infant in her arms.

Spangler's Dragoons, plunging into the fray, killed every woman they came to, all of them save the Ranger captive, apparently not knowing the difference. Cureton's settlers came pounding up in time to see the end of the scrimmage and express their disappointment.

The expedition made camp after the fight and compared notes, chief among them Sul Ross's personal combat with the warriors' leader. Young Charles Goodnight, noticing the captive's grief, and being a humane man as well as a lion-hearted fighter, went over to her: ". . . thinking her distress would be the same as that of our women under similar circumstances, I thought I would try to console her and make her understand that she would not be hurt. When I got near her, I noticed that she had blue eyes and light hair, which had been cut short. Her grief was distressing and intense, and I shall never forget the impression it made on me."

So, Sul Ross, later Governor of Texas, and his command, rescued a white captive from the Comanches. They did not know who she was, and she certainly did not act the part of a grateful

rescue-ee. On the return journey to Belknap, she had to be guarded as closely as a prisoner to prevent her escaping from her rescuers.

Arriving at Belknap, the supposition that she might be the long-lost, almost legendary Parker girl, caused Ross to send word for Colonel Isaac Parker, brother of the long-dead Silas, to come up and see if this was his vanished niece. The story goes that Colonel Parker, having no vivid remembrance of his brother's child, and forced to use an interpreter to talk with her, asked the woman if she remembered Cynthia Ann Parker. The morose, bitterly unhappy mother, straightened herself, patted her breast, and said, "Me Cincee Ann."

Despite all the earmarks of a happy ending, of the long-lost girl restored to her true place in society, such is not the case. Twenty-four years on the Plains, where her heart still lived, were too much to be offset. The State of Texas voted her a small annual pension. Her uncle, Colonel Parker, was named her guardian. Her new-found relatives made much over her and over her little girl, who was half-Parker. She, herself, with her habits of work, was not one to let her hands be idle, even at unfamiliar tasks with unfamiliar implements. But. . . . ?

Somewhere on the trackless ocean of grass, the *Bad Campers* still roamed as free as the wind that bent the grass. Somewhere out beyond the rim of the world, away from chimney smoke and the stale air trapped between four walls, a warrior named Peta Nokoni still rode, despite Sul Ross's firm belief that he himself had killed the chief in personal combat. Cynthia Ann knew that her husband and other warriors had been away from camp when the storm destroyed it; that Ross had killed a sub-chief named Nopah. And she knew that, somewhere under the directional stars, a young Comanche named Quanah learned his trade as a Comanche warrior should—by doing it.

Her only link with the life she loved was her little daughter, *Topsannah*, Prairie Flower. But in 1864, less than four years after her capture, the little girl child died despite the best efforts of the white medicine men to save her. Then did Cynthia Ann Parker turn her own face on her own will to live. Some say she starved herself to death; perhaps she died, literally, of a broken heart. The State of Texas erected a monument to mark her passing, a monument to all the women who made the frontier home when it was raw and the West was young.

But Cynthia Ann Parker left behind her more than a monument, more than her strange and tragic story. She left behind her son, Quanah, whose name meant odor, or perfume, perhaps signifying that he had been born to her amidst the brief flowering of the prairie flowers. Quanah became the last, probably the greatest, war chief the Comanches ever had; the man who forged the Southern Plains tribes, Comanche, Kiowa, Cheyenne, into a powerful force against civilization. When the war trail faded out, he followed the white man's road to better purpose than many white men. He became a friend of Theodore Roosevelt's, who knew a man when he saw one, and he won citizenship for his people. He became a prosperous rancher in Oklahoma's Comanche County, beneath the shouldering Wichita Mountains, and here he brought his mother's remains from Texas in later years to sleep in the land she loved so well.

Here, too, when his time came, they buried Quanah by her side, and this was as it should be, because he had given his mother the distinction of being the only woman of his people, and hers, who ever passed her name on to her children. Quanah, the war chief, is known to history as Quanah Parker, and his children kept that honorable name intact.

HIT THE TRAIL!—*A Western Quiz by Eric Manders*

TAKE a look at the map below and you'll notice a marked criss-cross pattern formed by the West's old-time trails. The east-west routes were blazed by trappers, traders, emigrants, and Forty-niners; the north-south routes by a different kind of traffic—uncountable herds of longhorns driven from Texas to the railheads and then to greener pastures farther north. The ten trails named all played important, and colorful, parts in the development of the West. Each has its own peculiar marking on the map. See if you can identify them, then turn to page 158 to check your answers. Eight or more correct qualifies you as a Trailblazer!

Chisholm Trail
Oregon Trail
Dodge City Trail
Old Spanish Trail
California Trail
Goodnight-Loving Trail
Sonoran Trail
Western Trail
Sedalia Route
Santa Fe Trail

Just another year, and the captain can return to the cities and civilization! The "dog soldiers" and a pair of clear blue eyes interfere.

OUTPOST

A Novelette by Walt Sheldon

CHAPTER ONE

Civilians and Dog Soldiers

THEY saw dust over the rise, they heard gunfire—and then for K Troop it was no longer just another quiet and lazy day. The captain lifted a yellow glove; they halted. They stared, a little white-faced, perhaps, toward the crest of the rise.

Tch-KANG! Vram! Vram!

There were not many guns, but they fired steadily.

It had been the kind of September day when the sky is deep blue all the way to the horizon, and the horizon is sharp and close enough to test with your thumb. It had been one of those days when smoke hangs flat. It had been a day that would almost make it a pleasure to be stationed in the blank, unmapped area somewhere between the Platte and Arkansas rivers.

Almost—

Captain Jesse Daniels stared with the rest. He was a big man with a face like a weathered cliffside and he rode a black charger. He was a trooper: heavy afoot, graceful when he rode.

And then Lieutenant Tom Cather came alongside. Cather was a graceful rider, too—but Cather was always graceful. He had been the best dancer at the Point, Class of '70. He was blond and slender and tall, and had a mole on the side of his chin exactly like a

beauty mark.

Cather said, "Look here—that sounds like an attack! You don't think the supply train has come through from Fort Laramie this early, do you?"

Jesse looked at the lieutenant flatly. The lieutenant, alas, talked a great deal. And for the most part said very little. The lieutenant was earnest. Jesse grunted, and then said, "Come on. Let's find out."

They took the rise at a long gallop, while the troopers stayed behind. The wind flattened their hat brims and dry-cooled their cheeks.

Jesse Daniels was liking this. Hard riding always made him feel better. Hard riding to break the monotony of exile—yes, it was exile, all right, and they didn't fool him with their talk about older, more experienced officers being needed in Indian Territory. But he supposed he'd better stop thinking about that. He'd promised himself he'd sit it out here, and wait for his pension, and then return. And have the last laugh on that tight little fraternity of West Point graduates, after all.

The two officers dismounted at the run, and moved carefully to the cover of a bottle-green juniper clump. They peered into the next hollow.

Cather said, "Jove!"

Jesse kept looking. His mouth was a tight seam, and there were white scars on his chin. Shiloh, they came from—the scar across his kidneys was from Fort Donelson. He'd been lucky at Nashville and hadn't had a scratch.

It was a single wagon down there; a prairie wagon with high Pennsylvania wains and Osnaburg canvas and six mules in the traces. One of the mules was wounded and thrashing. About twenty riders circled the wagon, firing into it.

"By the gods, they look like these dog soldiers we hear about!" said Cather. "That they do!"

They weren't all naked, and they didn't all wear feathers. There were some with felt hats and linsey-woolsey shirts. There was not much return fire from the wagon; it was slow and far apart.

Jesse backed away from the juniper, then lifted his hand and twirled it in a swift circle. Below, the troopers surged forward. There were twelve of them, roughly half of K Troop, and it had been their turn today to ride scout from the crude, unfinished stockade that was Fort Lummis, forty miles away.

They pounded up in fours. "On right into line!" Jesse shouted. "*Haw!*" They formed. "Draw-haw—*swords!* Trot—*haw!*"

The line jogged downslope toward the wagon. The attackers had seen them now and were scurrying to regroup.

"*Gallop, haw! Chaaaarge!*"

As one, they rose in the stirrups, lowering bridle hands and pointing sabers forward. Fourteen-times-four hoofs kettle-drummed the earth.

The attackers were together now. They wheeled suddenly in a mass, and rode hard for the rise on the left. Jesse led the detachment, veering, that way. The others rode Indian ponies—he thought he glimpsed the slit-ears of racing animals. One or two of them dared to turn and fire back.

Jesse knew suddenly they wouldn't be caught. He held up his hand, the troopers jogged to walk once more, and then he swung them back toward the wagon. He was only a few yards from the wagon when two figures emerged, lowering themselves rather

fussily from the front seat.

They were both women.

"Jove!" said Cather.

"Oh, shut up," said Jesse. He spurred forward.

The two women looked somewhat alike. The older was square-boned and a little stocky, and had very large, clear eyes. The younger had a thick, ginger-colored mane and a kind of toss to her head.

"Thank God," said the older woman. "Thank God you came when you did."

"Yes, ma'am," said Jesse.

"I'm Susan French, and this is my sister, Jane Cauley."

"Cap'n Jesse Daniels. Your servant, ma'am." Jesse had the feeling that all this was faintly dreamlike and ridiculous.

Cather rode up. His long lashes were very wide open. "Do you ladies mean to say you were—alone? Alone, facing those savages? I say!"

Susan French pointed to the wagon. "My husband—Martin's in there. He's wounded."

Jesse frowned and said, "I better have a look." He glanced at Cather and his glance said *take over*. He followed Susan to the wagon. He saw that she had a strong, square stride—a capable stride, like a good quarter horse. He always found himself comparing women with horses, though he wouldn't want a woman to know it. There were horses that mightn't like it, either—

And now he saw the man in the wagon, who was in great pain, and not really conscious. The man was heavy-set and wore a full beard.

"Stopped one, did you, old-timer?" said Jesse.

The man nodded, moaned, grimaced, and turned his head away.

Jesse looked at the wound. The ball—a big one from an old muzzle-loader, he would guess—had entered near the ankle and plowed up through flesh and bone to somewhere below the knee.

"Bad?" Susan French spoke in a whisper.

Jesse said, "Well—something'll have to be done about it."

"We were on our way to Fort Lummis. There's a surgeon there, isn't there?"

"I'm afraid not. Fort Lyons has the nearest surgeon. A good hundred miles. How come you were headed for Lummis?"

How come anybody ever headed for Lummis? he thought. How come *he* was there, and Cather, and Major Squires, the commandant, and Troops K and M, and how come Lummis itself was there? Oh, there was some nonsense about protecting the supply route south from Fort Laramie to Fort Lyons now that the mixed renegades called "dog soldiers" were robbing anything on the prairie that could be robbed and hoping the Cheyennes would be blamed for it—but that still wasn't excuse enough for Fort Lummis.

"This is the shortest way to our destination," Susan said. "My husband staked out a ranch near a little mining town, a new one called Denver. We wanted to get there before the first snow."

"He'll be delayed a bit now," said Jesse.

"Yes." She said it evenly, without complaint, and he liked that. He turned to step from the wagon again and for a moment their eyes met. Yes, her eyes were large and clear. There were lakes in Minnesota with that deep, intense blue. He hadn't noticed the color be-

fore. He dropped his own eyes quickly.

Outside he found Cather deep in conversation with Jane Cauley. Cather was being very earnest and self-important, as usual, and Jane was being very attentive.

Jesse said, "Cather, I want to speak to you alone." He hadn't really meant to do it that gruffly. Well, he wasn't much on manners; he knew that.

The women looked at him in some surprise, and then Cather stepped off with him. Cather's look said that Jesse's way of doing that was about what might be expected. But he didn't say anything.

"That's a bad wound in there," said Jesse. "Leg wound. In forty-eight hours it'll be green and purple. In seventy-two it might kill him. We'll have to get this wagon quick as possible back to Lummis. The commissary's got some cutware—I can work better there."

It took a moment for Cather to understand. He lifted his nicely formed eyebrows then. "You're not going to—operate on him *yourself?*"

"It's the better chance. Doubt if he'll live till we can get him to Lyons."

"But—look here, Captain. I mean—it's very much out of line, don't you see?"

"Oh, I reckon there's a regulation somewhere against it," said Jesse. "Won't be the first I've broken."

"Even so—"

Jesse cut him short. "You lead the troop, I'll drive the wagon. Stay with us. And let's hope the doggies don't come back to delay us again."

Cather looked at the rise, now empty against the cloudless sky and he seemed to sigh as he said, "I wish we'd pursued them."

Jesse smiled a little. "You'll get your battle someday, Cather. Doubt if it'll be at Lummis, but you be patient and you'll find your battle and your glory someday. Now form the troop, please."

Cather stared for just a moment at Jesse with a faint distaste curdling the stare, and then he moved off suddenly.

Jesse watched his broad back and lithe stride. He'd be a good officer someday, Jesse supposed, and he'd go far—he was ambitious. It was pretty clear he'd like command of K Troop, now; that would look good on his record. But Jesse had command of K Troop and Jesse's pension was only a year off, and Jesse meant to keep command of K Troop and not risk any reduction from his brevet rank. He'd come this far since Shiloh; he couldn't step down now.

He waited until the wounded mule had been cleared from the traces and then took his place on the driver's seat. Susan French sat beside him and Jane Cauley on the other side of her. Lieutenant Cather rode with them and Jane kept glancing at him. Susan kept glancing back at her husband. It made Jesse feel alone, somehow.

There was not much talk for the first few hours. Jesse stole glances at Susan when he dared. He liked the line of her neck; he liked her upturned nose and strong jaw that was yet not too stubborn. He had seen that profile somewhere before, he kept thinking. And then after a while it came to him—it was like the profile on the cameo brooch his mother had always worn.

It made him at once fidgety and sad. He scowled to cover up. He kept scowling.

They rode on, the wagon creaking and jolting, and the troopers clanking alongside. Night came, they rested, and moved on again. Cather sent the

scouts out on point. The stars appeared, countless numbers of them, dusted across the black sky. Martin French began to moan, and then to curse and howl. The skin of his leg was red and hot to the touch. Susan moved back and stayed beside him and Jesse kept scowling and driving.

He thought of the past. He was not old—he was not yet forty—but then he had been thinking about the past lately. Fort Lummis did that to a man. Jesse had volunteered young for the war with the Confederacy, and that was only twenty years ago, but it seemed another age, another lifetime. He'd won a regular lieutenancy and kept his brevet captain's rank. At the time it seemed best to stay with the cavalry and make a career of it. He hadn't realized then that a battlefield officer would have to buck the tight little group, the mutual scratchers of each other's backs, the West Point regulars. He had bucked at first, and of course he had lost. They had shunted him from one dull assignment to another, and he'd stuck—being damned if he would give them the satisfaction of resigning.

Well, next year his pension—and he could stick that much longer. Even at the squalid board and barkslab corral called Fort Lummis he could stick that much longer.

And after that? Well, what does an old soldier do? He sits in a rocker somewhere and smokes cigars and gets gray, then white, then wrinkled, and every day adds little lies to the big lie of the past—

No, not Jesse. Not Jesse Daniels. A city for him—any city—in fact, anyplace but these open, empty plains and big scowling mountains. Back East. Money to be made back there in all sorts of things. There was prosperity over the land, after the first big post-war depression, and the country was a-growing and a-building, and all the fool glory hunters and romantics were pushing west—and those who were smart were staying in the cities and making money because of the fool glory hunters and romantics.

Jesse had it pretty well figured out.

Near dawn the Fort Lummis picket challenged them and he gave the wagon reins to a trooper and rode on ahead.

Major Jehennem Squires, commandant, Fort Lummis, was not his usual impressive self in his nightgown. He looked little and puffy. His gray Burnside whiskers were not in place and stuck out from his cheeks like pulled cotton. Orderly Sergeant Monahan hadn't wanted to call him, and Orderly Sergeant Monahan had made haste to leave the room as soon as Jesse and the major were together.

Squires sat at his desk, lit a cigar, and said, "Now, what's this? What's this again, Captain? Civilians?"

Jesse explained slowly and patiently once more what had happened.

"Mm," said the major, blowing clouds of smoke. "Mm. I see."

Jesse knew he'd have to suggest a course of action, and help the major to think it was his own idea. That was the only way to get the major to do anything. He said:

"We'll have to put them up until this man French is ready to travel again. My quarters, mine and Lieutenant Cather's will do, I suppose. I guess we can squeeze in with Sergeant Monahan."

"Don't like that, Captain," said Squires, studying the end of his cigar.

"Officers in non-com's quarters."

"Well, we could put our guests in the stable," said Jesse, "but I reckon that would inconvenience the horses."

Squires didn't seem to notice the sarcasm. "They could push on to Lyons," he said. "We could spare a small escort for them."

"That man won't live till they get to Lyons."

"Mm. Possible. Possible, I suppose. Difficulty is, Captain, this thing is hardly our responsibility. Tragic, and all that, but if these emigrants had better sense they'd travel the safe routes—"

Jesse said, "They'll have to stay here. I'm going to operate on French."

"Operate?"

"I'm going to take his leg off."

"What? What's that, Captain?"

"He won't live if I don't."

"Now, see here, Captain, how do you know he won't live? You're not a surgeon, after all."

"I was in a hospital after Shiloh. They needed help there, Major, and they taught me to give it. I know a fevered wound when I see one."

"Well—" Squires stirred uncomfortably in his chair—"I don't like it. I don't like it a bit. I can hardly authorize it officially—"

"I'll take full responsibility," said Jesse, smiling faintly.

"Mm," said Squires. "Well—in that case—" He looked up suddenly. "Captain, I trust you'll not resort to your usual stimulus?"

Jesse laughed. "Not a drink, sir. Not one."

"John Barleycorn's hardly the thing on duty. You know my feelings about it."

"I know. Nothing to worry about, Major. You can go back to bed and finish your night's rest."

"Mm," said Squires. He nodded. "Believe I will, at that."

Chapter Two

Predictable Fact

ON JESSE'S orders four troopers carried the wounded man into the commissary, where there was a long, high table. He was barely conscious now; his skin was clammy and his breathing came in a series of short climaxes. On the table were rags, tubs of hot water, knives, a meat saw, and a bottle of whisky. A king bolt was being heated in the charcoal stove.

Jesse took the temporary bandage from French's leg. The fever was down, but the leg was beginning to turn color. He said to the men, "It won't be as bad as you think. Not the first part. Hold him with all your strength, though, when I get to the bone marrow."

There was a soft step behind him. A woman's voice said, "I'll keep the bandages coming."

He turned. Susan French stood there, and she was pale, but her mouth was firm. She did not look at the man on the table.

"Ma'am," said Jesse, "I don't think—"

"I've done it before," she said. "The siege of Washington, and after Second Bull Run. We called ourselves Florence Nightingales, and a Mr. Walt Whitman organized us."

Jesse stared at her for another moment, then said, "All right." He said it gruffly.

On the table Martin French stirred and muttered something about plow-

ing the north field.

"Give him the whisky," said Jesse.

He waited for the first of it to take effect. They kept pouring it into him, until he choked and spluttered with it.

Jesse leaned over him close and said, "What's your name?"

"Huh?" French's voice was deep, harsh in his throat. "Wha' name?" He blinked with great effort.

"All right. Hold him."

Jesse stepped back and started to work.

His mouth was dry and something flapped and struggled inside him like a snared eagle. It was the old fear. He would have given anything in the world for a fine, burning, jolting drink of whisky himself before he began.

The dream, the bad dream again. It was always like this when there was raw opened flesh and the bright, terribly bright red of blood, the shine of blood, and the sticky smell of it, and the gagging fog of decay.

("I'll have that red-hot king bolt now, Corporal.")

The stench of burning flesh, closing the artery.

His hands worked without him and his mind went back to those other horror-filled days. He'd fought at the start; he'd fought the thing inside him and he'd fought the enemy, too. He'd been a young fool, something like Cather. Something like the Frenches, who wanted to push west before the first snow. He had believed in things—

God, he would like a drink now. His throat ached. His hands were trembling.

A dream, a very bad dream.

Susan had been calm. Even when they went through the marrow and Martin French screamed like a heathen soul forever damned, she hadn't so much as murmured. Her lips had tightened until they were white as the inside of an oyster shell, but she hadn't made a sound.

Jesse realized that it was all over.

He wasn't there with the bad dream any more—he was lurching across the parade ground in the soft light of morning, and smoke was coming from the tin pipe in the roof of the non-com shack.

He went inside. Cather was dressed, combing his hair. Cather turned around and said, "Well?"

"It's done." Jesse sat down on the side of the bed and put his head in his hands. "Clean stump—I hope."

Cather smiled. "I think I know what you need, Captain." He stepped to the locker chest that had been dragged into these, their temporary quarters.

Jesse looked up sharply. This wasn't right. He'd been very strong about this; he'd been very careful not to drink so far—and he should rest now. not drink—

But Lord of Hosts he could use a drink!

Cather uncorked the bottle and handed it to him. Jesse held it for a moment, staring, then took a long, quick pull. Warmth flooded him. Strength. His brain cleared—at least, it seemed to.

"Thanks, Cather." He held on to the bottle.

Cather sat down beside him. "The major's quite an old woman about drinking, but, Jove, in a time like this a man needs a drink, doesn't he?"

"Sure, Cather, sure," said Jesse. He wasn't really listening. He took another drink.

Cather had a little smile on his face and Jesse didn't like it. Cather said, "I suppose the major's right, in a way.

An outpost like this could easily become a very drunken place—not much else to do, after all. But there is a responsibility. I mean, if these dog soldiers should attack the supply train when it comes, and we should be the ones to stop them—well, that would be pretty important."

"Glory, glory," said Jesse, and drank again. "Hallelujah," he said.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Glory. That's what you want, isn't it, Cather? You'd like to cover yourself with glory. You'd like to lead a fine gleaming charge and rout ten times your number in the enemy. You'd like to be in a history book, wouldn't you, Cather?"

"Well, look here—I—I'm a cavalry officer, you know. I'm aware of my duty, if that's what you mean."

"That's what I mean," said Jesse. At first he said it very gravely, and then he grinned a faintly foolish grin. The bottle was a third empty and his speech was becoming warmly thick and mellow now. "You know something, Lieutenant? I'm in a history book, Lieutenant. I'm in one already. I'm in the list of wounded. My name's there, in print. Isn't that wonderful, Lieutenant?"

Cather got up. "If you don't mind, Captain, I'm not required by custom or regulation to listen to abuse."

"Oh, go pin a tin medal on your britches," said Jesse.

The remark pleased him. He chuckled a little.

Cather stood there for another moment and stared at him. It was all there in Cather's pretty stare—every word he thought was there. Plain as could be. These battlefield officers, said that stare, they were all right as fighters, maybe, and they had been brave men, no doubt, but after all they weren't the real thing. They hadn't the sense of fitness, the honor, and the noblesse oblige—it was a different thing, that was all.

Cather turned sharply and went outside.

Jesse tilted the bottle high.

There was a wonderful daze. Things swirled merrily. He moved about and at times he sang to himself, and at times he merely chuckled.

He seemed to be outside. Funny, he didn't remember stepping outside.

He seemed to be at the door of his old quarters.

He knocked, not quite hitting the spot he had aimed at with his knuckles.

The door opened and Susan French looked at him in some surprise.

"Morning, ma'am." He grinned, and his bow was not quite accurate.

"Oh. Captain. Captain Daniels. Er—good morning—"

"Trust you're comfortable, ma'am. Of course, it's not the Planter's House or the New Willard's. It never is out here. Not out in this country. But the women keep coming out here, don't they, ma'am?"

(Now what in the devil was he angry about? He hadn't started out to be angry.)

"Yes, ma'am. They're going to be brave pioneers and settle the West, aren't they? They all want to get in the history books, just like Lieutenant Cather. Now, ain't that the truth, ma'am?"

The words were tumbling out of him, and he couldn't stop them. He didn't know why he was talking this way.

"Captain," said Susan, "you'd better rest. You'd better go back to your quarters and rest."

He swayed. He grinned. "You know

something, ma'am? I didn' think I'd ever say this, but I feel like saying it. Funnies' feeling. I'm in love with you, ma'am—I jus' decided that. How's it feel to have an old broken-down battlefield officer in love with you?"

"Please, Captain—if you don't mind." She started to shut the door.

"You can call me Jesse. And, ma'am, I'll tell you what. I'm going to kiss you. Oh—you don't have to look like that—I'm jus' going to kiss you once. That's all—jus' once. And then you can go on west and have your ranch with your husband and grow old before you're really old, huh? And then you can be in the his'ry books with Lieutenant Cather."

"Captain! Please!"

He reached for her. He reached to take her in his arms and pull her toward him.

"*Daniels!*" said a voice behind him. It sounded like sharp thunder.

He turned, mildly surprised. Major Jehennem Squires, commandant, Fort Lummis, stood there. The major was in full uniform, and his Burnside whiskers had been combed.

Jesse smiled happily and saluted. "H'lo, Major. The operation was a success, Major. It was very bloody and it was a success. Now you don' have to worry. You can go back to bed, Major. You can dream about being a general. I think you would make a lovely general, Major."

Squires's jowls trembled, so that the side whiskers seemed to shimmer in the morning light. "Captain, you will place yourself under immediate quarters arrest!"

Jesse thought that over. He shook his head and clucked his tongue. The major was putting him under arrest. But the major shouldn't do that, because you shouldn't put anybody who was in the history books under arrest.

He laughed again. He saluted again and said, "Pursuant to the orders of the comman'ing off'cer I hereby arres' myself. Come along, Daniels. Come along, battlefiel' captain."

Still laughing, he lurched back to the non-com shack. He staggered in, made for the bed, and the bed came up and struck him hard. Blackness enveloped him.

He came to in a ringing mist. He was still on the bed—he realized that. He was on his back and he had been covered. His head was a great ball of hot metal. It throbbed in deep tones, like a bell. He sat up and held it and moaned.

"Bad now, is it, sir?"

He turned his head and blinked and a big figure came into focus. Sergeant Monahan. Monahan was tall and barrel-chested and he had the hard, remote look of a very good and a very old sergeant.

Jesse said, "You wouldn't have a bucket of water on you? I'm afire."

"The pitcher might do," said Monahan, grinning. He took it from the ammunition case stand. "It's got a little green in it—but it's wet, if that's the prime requirement, sir."

"That is the prime requirement," said Jesse, and drank. He shuddered, put the pitcher down and got up. He saw that he was in his underwear. "Who performed the valet service?"

"A little out of my line, but I did my best, sir," said Monahan.

"Hm. Thanks." Jesse poured some water into the basin and began to wash. He looked up. "Was I very bad?"

"You were a holy roarin' devil, sir, if I may say so. You wanted to box.

You said all officers and gentlemen knew how to box because they taught it at the Point."

Jesse nodded sadly. He washed some more, then said, "Now, let's see. The thing to do is reconstruct. What time is it?"

"Evening. Retreat's blown already."

"I slept quietly all day?"

"Not quietly, sir. More like a bull in a sawmill."

Jesse struggled into his trousers, then started to put his boots on. "And I'm under quarters arrest, I think. Yes —I remember that, now. I didn't behave very well, Sergeant, and I'm under quarters arrest."

"That's right, sir." Monahan coughed. "Lieutenant Cather is in acting command of Troop K."

Jesse stopped adjusting his spurs and looked at him. "Yes. Of course. Cather would step into command if I stepped out, wouldn't he?"

"You might call that axiomatic fact, sir." Monahan scratched his chin thoughtfully. "You might even call it predictable fact. You might even say someone could predict it, then make it happen."

"Come on, Sergeant, what is it?" said Jesse. "What do you know? Out with it."

"Well, sir," said the sergeant thoughtfully, "I'm not one to be jumping at conclusions, but I did happen to be in the orderly room when Lieutenant Cather came in. And I did happen to overhear a word or two of his conversation with the major. I thought at the time what a pity he couldn't quietly fetch you and put you to bed—I would have helped him, if he'd asked —instead of reporting to the major how drunk you were."

Jesse's jaw hardened. Strata shifted in the weathered cliffside. "So that's it. So that's what he figured all the time." The brevet rank—the pension—the bit he'd need to get started—it didn't seem so certain now. "Where's the lieutenant?"

"Oh, he'll be back afore dawn," said Monahan, grinning. "He's out walking the parapet with that Miss Cauley. Very pretty young lady she is, too—and—" He cocked his head. "You wouldn't be going to call on Lieutenant Cather this minute, would you, Captain?"

Jesse was already at the door. "It crossed my mind," he said.

Monahan frowned. "Captain, would that be exactly the best thing to do, now?"

"Maybe not the best," said Jesse, "but I assure you, Sergeant Monahan, it will be most satisfactory. Most satisfactory."

Monahan sighed, and Jesse went out.

Chapter Three

Night Raid

IT WAS a fine night. It was a fine western September night again, and without a breeze there was yet a bite to the air to remind you that you were alive. Not many stars were showing: instead, a very thin cotton blanket of a cloud, high as a cloud can stay, and the moonlight barely seeping through.

Jesse looked around him as he crossed toward the south parapet. This wall was the only part of the fort that had been finished. The others were stockades, or the walls of the buildings themselves. He looked at the gate as

he passed. That had been built in a hurry, too, of timbers hauled here by wagon train. There was no timber near by, not in this country. And it was not much of a gate. A group of fairly strong children, he felt, could break it down with an aspen pole—

He saw movement on the parapet as he approached, and he thought at first it might be a sentry, but then he saw that there were two figures. Jane Cauley and Lieutenant Tom Cather were walking arm in arm, heads toward each other, voices low.

He climbed the ladder to the parapet, and as he gained it, Cather and his lady friend turned to walk the other way. He knew from their sudden stop that they had seen him.

He walked toward Cather slowly, and came to a halt a few paces away.

"Oh, Captain Daniels," said Jane. "Good evening." She was wearing a hooded velvet cloak, and the hood hung loosely behind the ginger waterfall of her hair.

"Miss Cauley," Jesse said, "I'm going to have to be rude again. The lieutenant and I have a very important private discussion. I'd appreciate it if you'd return to your quarters."

Jane lifted one eyebrow. Cather had been holding her hand in the crook of his arm. He patted it.

"I think I know what the captain's private discussion is. Yes, you'd better go, Jane."

She said, "All right—if you say so—but—"

He patted her hand again. Then she scurried past Jesse, lifting her skirts, and as she turned she gave him a curious, white-faced glance. She disappeared down the ladder.

Cather was looking steadily at Jesse. "Before you start, Daniels, you'd better think again. There wasn't anything personal in it—you know that. Let's face it. You're not in the right place; you're not the man to be commanding Troop K. Something else perhaps, but troop command—"

Jesse unbuttoned his blouse. "I'd advise you to take yours off, too, Cather. You'll have more room to swing."

Cather sighed. "Very well." He removed his tunic, too.

Then they faced each other. Jesse crouched. Cather took an upright stance with the backs of his fists turned outward. Jesse's face was grim; Cather wore a look of sleepy detachment.

"Well, we'll see what you learned at the Point," said Jesse.

"I remember it—come on," said Cather.

Jesse stepped in and swung wildly. His fist and arm struck cushioned air, and he saw only a blur as Cather moved out of the way. Before he could balance himself for another blow something hard and smart struck him on the cheek, below the eye.

Jesse grunted and swung again.

He pressed on Cather; he kept swinging. This lad was as difficult to hit as a persimmon on a string. And he was pinking Jesse neatly here and there. He had a way of twisting or snapping his knuckles when they struck, and this kept opening little cuts in Jesse's skin. Jesse kept at it.

He maneuvered, and managed to crowd Cather against the wall of the revetment. He pummeled hard, then, watching Cather's white face twist and grimace with every blow. He punched him in the body and in the head, until Cather's head began to jerk limply when it was struck.

Jesse stepped back and threw a long,

carefully aimed fist to end the whole thing.

Cather somehow dodged that blow. Somewhere, out of sheer bottom, he found the wit and strength to flick his head to one side.

Jesse's fist smashed hard into the adobe wall. Fiery needles of pain shot all the way to his elbow. He wanted to scream, but he held it in. Only a grunt sounded.

Then Cather slipped away from the parapet. And again the lieutenant was stabbing at Jesse quickly, from every direction, opening new cuts, spreading the old ones. Jesse realized suddenly what he should have realized before—the man had youth, and youth counted when the battle stretched this far. Jesse's arms were becoming great weighted beams.

He struck Cather with his right fist, and the pain zigzagged all the way to his elbow again. Couldn't use that fist—have to do it with the other now—

Cather was tack-hammering coolly, crowding him to the edge of the parapet. He felt his foot step into air; he thrashed for balance—and didn't find it. He went over. He struck the ground twelve feet below with his back, and he gasped for breath, but there wasn't any.

He was looking at everything through a great block of melting gelatin.

He seemed to hear shooting—

Wait—it was shooting! Loud voices, too—orders—there was the sound of running feet, and the stutter of hoofs.

A distant shout: "*Post number three—alaaaarm!*"

There was a scream, and Jesse had the impression it was that same sentry who screamed.

Cather was bending over him. Cather was lifting him by the shoulders. "Captain—you all right? Can you get up?"

"Yes. Sure," said Jesse thickly. He shook Cather's arms from his shoulders. He looked around in bewilderment. "What—what is it?"

"Attack," said Cather. "Attack on the fort. We'll need weapons—come on!"

It was confusion, like any battle. Jesse stumbled through it, not knowing quite what was happening. By the time he reached non-com quarters and buckled on his dragoon pistol and saber, his head cleared and his breath returned. His injured hand still ached miserably, but he found that he could lift a saber—and that was all that mattered.

He and Cather ran out into the parade area again.

Troopers were running everywhere and non-coms were trying to shout orders, but you couldn't hear any words. The firing was a corps of a hundred drums, it was faster than the arm of the devil beating tanbark. Gun flashes were matches struck harshly and angrily across the night—

K Troop. Where was K Troop? He remembered now—their job was to man the parapet in case of attack. He ran that way again. He had lost Cather now. He bumped into a corporal; they both stumbled, and then picked themselves up again and ran.

Powder smell was thick in his nostrils. He climbed the ladder. Here was K Troop, all right, in line and breasted to the revetment. Troopers without their horses firing carbines into the night. Here was Sergeant Monahan. His face glistened with sweat and there was a smudge on his cheek.

Monahan pointed across the fort. "The gate, Captain! They're having

Ned's own time with the gate!"

A ball came out of nowhere and tore out the back of a trooper's head. He looked surprised, though there was really no surprise, nor any other feeling in him, and then he toppled from the parapet.

Jesse looked at the gate. It was bulging; the gate bar was bent and ready to splinter. Half of M Troop was there, some crowding to the stockade and firing over it; some standing back, waiting.

Where the devil were the horses?

"Sergeant, what's the return fire from this quarter?"

"Light, sir. Only flankers."

"Did you get a look at any of them?"

"They're dog soldiers, Captain. Pretty sure of that. Didn't think they'd dare attack—but they have. Must be a reason for it."

"Doubtless," said Jesse. "All right, we'll take a chance. We'll move K Troop to the gate."

Monahan didn't even mention that Cather was in command of K Troop now. Maybe he had forgotten. Anyway, Cather wasn't anywhere in sight at the moment.

K Troop crowded down the ladder. The enemy broke through the gate as they did. Jesse saw them—both whites and Indians, and they had pikes and lances and swords and pistols, and some swung rifles, and one 'breed in the garb of a buffalo hunter had thonged a skull-cracker ball upon a stick.

Jesse was in the midst of it then, swinging his saber. A man exploded out of the darkness and he chopped at the man, and the saber bit into the man's shoulder, nearly severing the arm. The man screamed, but there was so much shooting and screaming all about that Jesse scarcely heard it.

The corner of his eye caught movement. He turned to face it. He saw the rifle butt swinging through the air and he knew it would strike, he realized that, the moment before it did.

He heard the single thunderclap in his own skull. Later, he remembered thinking how odd that he should hear it before the blackness came.

When consciousness returned he was sitting, not lying, on the ground, and there were dead men all around him and it was strangely, heavily quiet.

Live men moved softly among the dead.

The smell of powder still hung in the air. The clouds, in mid-sky, had parted and the moon shone through. It was very bright—it was almost fierce.

"Captain! There you are!"

Jesse looked up. Major Squires. The major was still in uniform, though he had unfastened one or two top buttons. His whiskers were still well combed.

"Yes." Jesse held his head. "I think I'm here. I think it's me, all right."

"Ah—immediate conference in my office. If you don't mind, Captain."

"Thought I was under quarters arrest."

"Well—under the circumstances—"

"All right, all right, I'll be there."

In the little room the oil lamp flickered. Cather was there, and Markham, the adjutant, and Captain Jensen and Lieutenant Blayne of M Troop. Squires took himself importantly to the desk and sat down. He looked at all of them.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "well—this has been a sorry and most unfortunate thing."

Nobody said anything. Everybody looked very tired.

"The damage is not fully assessed yet," said the major, "but we know most of the horses have been driven off. The scoundrels came right in and drove off our horses."

"We'll get them, sir," said Cather. "We'll get them back." His fists were clenched at his sides. His hair was mussed, and his face dirty, and his shirt was torn—but he still managed to look handsome. The very picture of a hero, thought Jesse, and almost laughed.

"I understand there is a horse or two left," said Squires. He looked very old tonight; his eyes were puffy. "It seems to me the only thing we can do is send an immediate express to Fort Lyons advising them of our predicament."

He was, of course, inviting suggestions that he might adopt as his own.

Cather stepped forward. "We have wagons and mules, sir. With the Frenches' wagon, at least four teams. Why not send a wagon to Lyons and let it carry several troopers for protection. Let myself and another volunteer take the horses—we'll go after the renegades and get our mounts back. Somehow."

Squires frowned. He wouldn't know whether or not to cross the Red Sea if it opened before him, thought Jesse.

Then Jesse said, "Don't be a fool, Cather."

Cather whirled on him. "Fool? I'm a fool, am I, because I'm here for duty and not to sit on my hams and wait for the government's charity?"

"Now, gentlemen, gentlemen," said Squires wearily.

Sergeant Monahan broke into the room. His barrel chest went up and down, up and down, and his big face was anxious and drawn. "Sir—major—it's the civilians—the Frenches and Miss Cauley—"

"What? What about them?"

"Gone. Their shack busted into. Mr. French carried right out of the commissary—some men from M Troop saw it—they couldn't stop it or do a thing—"

"God, no!" said Cather hollowly.

Jesse held himself. The major rose, then. He said, "They'd have a reason for doing that. They want to draw us out. They want us to come chasing after them and rescue their captives for some reason."

"Yes, sir," said Jesse. For once the old fool had guessed the right answer to something, he thought. "Pretty clearly they want to ambush us, sir, and wipe us out." He coughed with just a small note of apology. "Pretty clearly, they've got the men to do it, too."

Cather pushed forward and then leaned on the desk with his palms. He thrust his face at the major.

"Sir, I propose we accept their challenge. They want to spring an ambush on us—very well, let's let them do it. Let me take K Troop in the wagons and get on their trail. M Troop can stay with the fort here. We'll be looking for their ambush and that means they'll have lost their biggest advantage—surprise."

The major's face was very troubled. He ran his hand over his thinning hairline, and then down along one side whisker. His forehead was full of corrugations.

"Can't very well do that, Lieutenant. Can't, really. That would be splitting the command. Custer did that with his command up in the Dakotas last June. No, splitting the command's bad business."

"This is different, sir. We were sur-

prised last night—they broke in. It wasn't much more than a swift raid; if they'd stayed to finish the battle I believe we would have beaten them badly. And I think I can beat them with K Troop, providing they don't surprise me." Cather's eyes were like the eyes of a hungry man.

Jesse smiled at him a little sadly. "So you'd like to do it, would you, Cather? You'd like to go out there and rescue the captives and be a very big hero. Likely a very dead hero."

Cather turned swiftly. "Daniels, I've had about enough of your abuse! I—"

Jesse held up his hand. He was still smiling. "Just a moment, Cather." He looked at Squires. "Sir, I urge adoption of the lieutenant's plan."

Squires's eyebrows rose and he said, "What? You—you're for it?"

"Yes. There's something in what the lieutenant says. Taking away their advantage of surprise, we have a chance. Besides I've a little scheme in mind—a little addition to the lieutenant's plan."

"Scheme? What scheme?"

"I'd rather work it out a bit further before I explain it—if you don't mind, sir. Talk it over with Cather. And then the two of us can take K Troop in pursuit."

Cather was staring at Jesse in complete surprise. The major was frowning. The major said, "You want to go along with Cather, then?"

Jesse hooked his thumbs in his belt, continued to smile and said, "I think he'll want a man with battlefield experience along. I think it'll work best that way."

The major started to scratch his cheeks and shift in his chair, and scowl and make throat noises—and Jesse knew that in a moment or two he'd give permission.

Minutes later Jesse found himself in the parade area again with Cather. They were headed for the stables to round up the wagons and mules, and what horses were left. Jesse had explained his plan in outline, and he would go over the details with Cather later.

But now Cather touched his arm and stopped him, and made a puzzled search of his eyes. Cather's face looked very white in the moonlight.

"Captain—"

"Yes, Lieutenant?"

"Why did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"You know what I mean. Backing me up in this thing—deciding to come along. You're the one that doesn't especially want to be a hero, Jesse."

Jesse frowned very deeply and for a moment it seemed he might break out in anger. "I don't know what you call it, Tom," he said finally, "and I can't even explain exactly what it is. But let's say some of it, well, rubbed off you and got on me."

Cather grinned. "Jove," he said softly.

"Oh, shut up," Jesse said, and pushed on toward the stables.

Chapter Four

Counter-Ambush

K TROOP took what rest it could find that night. M Troop made the preparations. It was dawn then, when four wagons, each one mule-drawn, clattered from the gate and headed northwest. The first and largest wagon was the Pennsylvania that

had belonged to the Frenches. The second was a smaller prairie wagon with hickory bows and rounded canvas, the third was a sutler's wagon with its typical box-top, and the fourth a comparatively fragile ambulance.

There were troopers packed in each wagon; they busied themselves checking pistols and carbines.

Jesse and Lieutenant Tom Cather rode at the head of the train, side by side. Behind and to their right the sky was turning the color of salmon steak. Ahead it was gray; the distant line of the mountains was just beginning to emerge from that grayness. It was cool and very quiet.

For a long time neither Jesse nor Cather spoke; each rode in a blanket of his own thoughts, and each stared ahead watching the dawn flush overtake the darkness to the west. By the time it was fully light they were out of sight of the fort. Jesse glanced back. A thin scarf of smoke lay on the horizon, as if spread there carefully, and that was where the fort was.

He looked ahead again. The trail made by the dog soldiers was very plain: their horses had trampled a virtual road across the soft prairie sod. Trackers from M Troop had found the start of it while K Troop rested, and then sent them off in the right direction.

Presently Cather fumbled for a moment in the breast pocket of his blouse. He took two cigars out.

"Smoke?"

"Hm? Oh—yes. Thanks. Don't mind if I do."

They lit up on flaring sulphurous matches. They puffed awhile and kept riding.

"It's up to the troop," Jesse said finally. "It all boils down to them."

"They'll be equal to it. They'll come through."

Jesse smiled. "And if they don't?"

"Then we've made a very great mistake." Cather had to smile, too. "Then we're bumblers and incompetents instead of heroes."

Jesse nodded and sighed, and they rode some more.

There was a thought that kept pecking at him inside, insistently, like a catbird. It was a thought he didn't want—and yet he knew it would not be realistic to ignore it. The thought was this: even now it was possible that Susan French was not alive. Or if she was alive, perhaps the unspeakable had happened—

He thought mainly of Susan, of course. Two others had been captured with her, but it was Susan's image he saw: the fine square shoulders and the calm, openwork face and the large, frank eyes. He hated himself bitterly for acting as he had at the door of her quarters. He knew now that possibly those were the last words he was to say to Susan French.

He kept thinking of her, in the way an unhappy man lashes himself. He made the torture deliberate. He wondered how he would have felt about Susan if he had met her, unattached, some years ago. Would he have been struck by her the same way, then? Would he have courted her—asked for her hand in marriage? And would he have resigned his commission some time ago in order to make a decent way in the world for both of them?

But this was futile; this was as futile as anything could be. Susan, if she lived, belonged to somebody else, and if they managed to rescue her this day, that would be the last he'd ever see of her.

Which, looking at it sensibly, was probably the best thing for everybody concerned.

"Jesse—ahead there. Does that look like something to you?" Cather was pointing.

There was a large draw ahead, a dry river bed at least a hundred yards wide. A few miles off it curved to the right and disappeared. Then, a little beyond the curve, a thin haze of dust was showing, as though something under the dust stirred it up and caused it to hang there.

"Might be their camp," said Jesse. "Just might."

There was a flicker of movement on the sky line. It could have been a rider, or it could have been a wild horse or antelope. They didn't see it long enough to know.

"All right," said Jesse, "we'll take the chance. We'll swing the wagons in this direction." He pointed south. He turned and rode the few paces back to the first wagon. Sergeant Monahan was driving it. But Sergeant Monahan was no longer in uniform; he wore the bright red shirt and black felt of a teamster. That was part of Jesse's plan.

"Feeling a little bored, Sergeant? Wish something would happen?" asked Jesse.

Monahan grinned. "I wouldn't mind getting this over with, sir, if the truth be known."

"I think our renegade friends may oblige you very shortly." Jesse matched his grin. "Swing the train south, Sergeant, and skin your eye. And remember—not a shot until you can drop your sight on one of their buttons. They've got to be surprised, or there'll be a lot of dead troopers today."

"We'll try to make some dead dog soldiers first," said Monahan. He stood up, turned to look back, and signaled the change of direction to the other wagons. They began to swing left.

Jesse rode off to the right, beckoned to Cather and said, "Come on."

The two officers rode hard, side by side. The horses swung into a long, rocking-chair gallop, and Jesse sat motionless in the saddle, his stirrups long. They rode a wide circle, starting northward and after a couple of miles veering west. They left the clanking wagons behind and kept as much as possible to the bottomland, out of sight.

Minutes later the horses were slightly lathered and their barrels heaving with their breath. They slowed to a walk. There was a long, gentle rise ahead and the faint dust cloud was just over this rise. Jesse lifted his hand, and they stopped and listened for a moment. Faint shouts and cries came from over the rise.

"It's them, all right," said Cather. His slender face was drawn and his eyes were bright.

Jesse pointed to an outcropping at the top of the rise. Scrub fir and a few scattered boulders ran along the line of exposed rock. They spurred the horses again and headed that way. Just before reaching the outcrop, they dismounted, crouched, and moved forward on foot.

Their circling had brought them around to the north of the dog soldiers' camping-place. They hid themselves behind a boulder and stared down into it now. Just a few hundred yards away there was a muddy water hole in the river bed, and several fires had been built here, and one or two Army tents —doubtless stolen—had been pitched. There was a lean-to of poles and buffalo skins near one of the fires.

Toward the edge of the camp nearly a hundred horses were crowded into a rope corral. Jesse recognized some of the cavalry mounts among the smaller, split-eared Indian ponies. The dog soldiers—whites and Indians from at least a half-dozen tribes—either sat or dozed or moved about the camp aimlessly. A few were cleaning weapons.

"I don't see Jane," whispered Cather. "I don't see her anywhere—"

"The lean-to, for a guess," said Jesse. "That's where they'd have their captives, I think."

"The scum. The dirty swine," said Cather—

Jesse said nothing. Anger rose in his own chest, but he fought it—he wanted a clear head now, for what they had to do. He wondered how much longer they would have to wait, and then, as he wondered that, a rider suddenly pounded into the camp, rode to one of the tents, and dismounted. A tall, heavily bearded white man in greasy buckskins came out of the tent. The rider began pointing excitedly and talking, although they couldn't hear what he said.

"That's it," said Jesse. "The train's been spotted."

The camp suddenly sprang to life. Men shouted and ran for the horses. Others scurried to pick up weapons. One half-naked brave held a rifle aloft, whooped lustily, and executed several dance steps before running for his mount.

Altogether it took perhaps five minutes. The dog soldiers were formed in a mass then—a good sixty or seventy of them, Jesse estimated—and the bearded man in buckskins was at the head of them. He swung his arm and they moved off down the dry river bed at a brisk trot.

They had left sentinels in the camp. Six men stood there afoot and waved them off.

The dog soldiers took the turn in the river bed, and then they were out of sight. Jesse waited until the clanking and shouting died away.

He looked at Cather. "Well," he said, "no time like the present."

"I suppose you're right," said Cather.

The two men stared at each other for a moment. Cather grinned suddenly and held out his hand. Jesse took it and gripped it.

"See you in hell, maybe," said Jesse.

Cather shook his head. "They wouldn't let a West Pointer in. Let's go."

They mounted again. They spurred hard and they rode their horses downslope toward the camp in a swift, thundering gallop. They drew their swords.

Jesse's temples were pounding, and he felt almost drunk. Above the sound of the hoofs he called to Cather, "Here's a rebel yell—I learned it at Shiloh!" He stood in the stirrups and bellowed, "*Yee-HEEEEE-Hoo!*"

Cather laughed wildly and gave a yell of his own, exactly like it.

The six men in the camp had already whirled to face them. Jesse saw them ahead, standing there, pointing their rifles. He saw the gray smoke blossom out, and then heard the sound, lagging it by the smallest part of a second. He rode on. The image of the six men swelled as he raced toward it. Four were Indians—one was the buffalo hunter in the fringed shirt and floppy black hat—the sixth was a white man in the wool garb of a prairie drover.

They were nearly upon them now, and shots blasted into their faces. It seemed incredible that they weren't hit. Cather was still beside Jesse, pac-

ing him; Jesse could see him from the corner of his eye.

And then the buffalo hunter was directly ahead and below. He was cocking his Henry carbine for another shot. Jesse saw the terror in his eyes, and his face turned upward only for a moment, as though in a sudden throb of white lightning. Jesse swung hard, and the saber struck the man's skull dead-center, folding the black hat up upon itself. The man screamed and fell.

There were several shots, and they came from behind Jesse. The momentum of his charge had carried him beyond the group, and he was turning the horse. The horse stumbled. Jesse felt himself falling, and then he struck the ground and rolled and scrambled to his feet again. He had lost his saber. He tugged at his pistol and brought it out.

Two of the Indians were running toward him; a bayonet fixed to the ancient musket was held by the one on the right. The one on the left stopped short and lifted his rifle.

Jesse held his pistol with a stiff arm, thrusting it forward. He took quick careful aim. He pulled the trigger and the big weapon bucked in his hand, and then when the thin smoke cleared away the Indian with the rifle had a blue hole at the bridge of his nose and was falling face forward.

Jesse turned to face the other. The bayonet was barely ten feet away. He fired again. He saw the man jerk as the bullet struck his body, but the man kept coming. Jesse tried to slide under the bayonet, and the point caught his shoulder, tearing a deep ridge along the muscle. The Indian fell on top of him, and the muzzle of Jesse's revolver was pressed to the man's body, and Jesse pulled the trigger—

It was all nightmare after that. It was all without logic or sequence. There were six sprawled rag dolls of bodies on the ground, scattered, and Jesse's shoulder was white-hot with pain, and Cather was running toward the buffalo-skin lean-to, and Jesse was stumbling along after him.

Susan was in the lean-to. She was sitting and her hands were bound in the small of her back. Jane Cauley was beside her. Martin French lay behind both of them, and he lay there curiously still.

Susan looked up with one startled look and then she began to sob hysterically. Jesse heard himself saying, "There—there—it's all right, now." He was fumbling at her bonds, hurting his fingernails on the tough rawhide. Her flesh was blue where it had bitten into her wrists.

"They've horses in the rope corral," Jesse said. "You'll have to run to them while Cather and I carry Martin—"

Susan said, through her sobs, "Martin won't have to come with us. He won't have to come."

Jesse knew then why the man looked so still.

He never did remember how they managed to get to the horses, and how they rode away from the camp. His head didn't clear until they were once more on the open prairie, circling back toward the wagons. They could hear the stuttering gunfire in that direction. Before they came into sight of the wagons the gunfire had stopped and the prairie was quiet under the bright sun and open sky.

And then they circled a low mesa and the wagons were directly ahead on a flat sweep of plain. They had halted. Scattered around the wagons were fallen men and riderless horses. Jesse

didn't count, but he estimated thirty or forty. The men of K Troop stood closer to the wagons, some already cleaning their guns.

Sergeant Monahan in his bright-red teamster's shirt came out to meet them. His grin was set into his face like something carved in oak. He saluted roughly.

"Three wounded, not a man lost, Cap'n. Enemy routed. K Troop, in a manner of speaking, enjoyed itself thoroughly. And the doggies fell for your bait, hook, line, and sinker."

Jesse felt Cather's eyes upon him. He turned, and Cather was indeed staring, and there was, Jesse swore, admiration in his eyes. It embarrassed Jesse a bit.

He said, "Hell, Tom, it was just something I learned from the Johnny Rebs. Draw the enemy somewhere—make him fight on your own terms, and on the ground you pick. They did it to us all the time in the Western campaign."

"But dressing the wagon drivers like civilians, so they'd think the supply train for Lyons was passing through—well, Jesse, that was a stroke of genius. If I ever do a tour at the Point, by the gods, I'll teach it in my classes!"

It took some moments then to get the troopers back into the wagons and head them for Fort Lummis once more. Susan rode in the lead wagon beside Sergeant Monahan. Jesse trotted up alongside. Her face was still anxiously drawn as she turned it toward him, but her eyes were clear and her voice was calm again.

"I owe you my deepest thanks, Captain—for everything."

"And I owe you my deepest apologies," said Jesse. "The way I behaved—those things I said to you—well, if it's at all possible to withdraw them, I do."

She managed a smile. She didn't say anything, she just smiled briefly, and then turned her eyes forward.

Jesse studied the cameo profile, the firm chin, the slightly upturned nose. Well, it wasn't a time for talking, but he had much to say. Later—later there would be a time to say it. He would say then that he didn't withdraw *everything* he had told her, that when he'd said he loved her, that was true. And if she'd have an old battlefield soldier with not much more than a pension to his name—

He switched around in the saddle and stared west. The mountains were still there, the distant mountains, low and sharp on the horizon. He knew suddenly that he wanted to go in that direction, taking her with him by the hand, and he knew suddenly that before it was all over he would be helping to write the history books again, and that in fact he could not escape it.

THE END

Answers to "Hit the Trail!" Quiz on page 138

'''''''''''	CHISHOLM TRAIL	————	GOODNIGHT-LOVING TRAIL
—·—·—	OREGON TRAIL	—·—·—·	SONORAN TRAIL
oooooo	DODGE CITY TRAIL	›››››››	WESTERN TRAIL
ccccccc	OLD SPANISH TRAIL	×××××××	SEDALIA ROUTE
--------	CALIFORNIA TRAIL	·····	SANTA FE TRAIL

Free-for-All

THIS MONTH ZGWM welcomes back once more one of the top young Western writers of today—Les Savage, Jr., whose novel, "Land of the Lawless," leads off the issue. Les has been writing only a few years but his magazine-story output has been large and "Land of the Lawless" is his fifth book-length novel, the third to appear first in ZGWM. The last previous one, incidentally, has now been published in book form by Doubleday: *Shadow Riders of the Yellowstone*. "Land of the Lawless" is not only a fine action story, but is notable also for its sympathetic glimpses of the Navahos.

• Walt Sheldon's novelette, "Outpost," is his third ZGWM appearance—high time we told our readers something about the author (they already know he produces highly readable yarns). Asked for some personal data, Walt writes:

"I'm a transplanted Easterner. Stationed at a New Mexico air base during the war, I couldn't stand the Eastern climate when I went back to my old job afterward. So I came out to Taos in a coupe and battered trailer, pretending it was a covered wagon and I was a tall, sun-whipped, silent fellow in smoke-blackened buckskins. Actually, I'm short and stocky—all right, pudgy, then—and like to talk your ear off. I can't ride worth a hoot, and I grind my teeth at Western music. But the West excites me; I spend hours jawing with old-timers and plaguing the librarian at the State Historical Society in Santa Fe, and sometimes I come up with a story. I like whisky and coffee and rare steak and animals and airplanes; don't like tall buildings, rain, neckties, jukeboxes, and subways. I'm 34, a registered Democrat, irreligious, and opinionated. For years I smoked a pipe and tried to look like a writer, finally gave it up and went back to chain-puffing on cigarettes. All this has little to do with writing—but it's the kind of thing authors put in autobiographies."

His agent adds what Walt was too modest to tell himself: an Air Force Captain, he flew all around China for the CBI, even in a piggyback seat rigged on a one-seater with a load of wire-recorder in his lap, dictating a blow-by-blow account of the mission for the Army Air Force Hour. Later, he produced the first daily television newsreel, over Philadelphia's WFIL-TV.

• And now the floor goes to new

ZGWM author Wallace Umphrey ("The Craftsman"):

"After picking up an electrical-engineering degree at the U. of Washington, I took a couple of writing courses, though nothing much came of it until ten years later. I've done a little newspaper work, both editorial and shop; have been a marine radio operator and an aircraft inspector. Main hobby is listening to all sorts of folk music, of which New Orleans jazz is a part; particularly enjoy mountain ballads and cowboy songs. For the past four years I've done nothing but write—it seemed like an easy way to make a living. Moved my family to a remote spot on the shores of Vashon Island, in Puget Sound. Family consists of three children, two dogs, a cat, and a patient, understanding wife. I've always found Western Americana a fascinating subject—what people wore and ate, how they talked and thought and acted. But—making a living by writing is harder than anything!"

From the mailbag: R. G. ("Tex") Dayton of Flagstaff, Arizona, registers a kick, caps it with a posie: "I have relied on ZGWM for relaxation for three years; always bought the magazine wondering what the picture offering on the back cover would be, looking forward to it with anticipation. Then you start putting a hodge-podge of artist's imaginings on it every so often. But when you stop putting on the picture and use the space for a billboard—how would *you* like salt in your wounds?" Then he comments enthusiastically on ZGWM's stories, adding: "I am no longer amazed at their excellence. You can't increase the quality, only the quantity. But please put back those pictures!"

Trouble is, costs have gone up so we had to economize somewhere! And the back cover was the obvious place to cut down.

—THE EDITORS.

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THE OLD-TIME COWHAND—AND THE MODERN

TIMES change, and everything changes with them. But the old-time cowhand is not gone—he's still here, in a way of speaking. He's still a-cowboying, though in a different way. Sure, the modern hand has gone a mite dude in his get-up; that's due to the rodeo influence. The old-time Angora stovepipe chaps are replaced by leather batwings that are easily buckled on. The old slick saddles now have bucking-rolls built in on the tree. The cantles are a heap lower and easier to dismount from. Where the old-timers broke and worked jugheaded broncs, the modern cowboy interbreeds his mount and gets the best out of the coldblooded bronc's stamina plus the hot blood and understanding qualities of the thoroughbred. The old-timer had unfenced range and a cow didn't have much value then; now the high price of beef and the fences go along together. The range is just as big; there are more cattle and the cowhand has increased his efficiency in handling 'em. Where the old-timer left off and the modern hand began is 'most any point you want to choose on a continuing line of development. The cowboy tries to make a top hand on whatever range progress places him.

DAN MULLER

In This Issue:

LAND OF THE LAWLESS, *by Les Savage, Jr.*

A colorful, fascinating novel of a frontier lawyer's desperate battle to solve a brutal murder and win justice for his Navaho friends. When Lee Banner offers to defend the wrongly accused father of lovely, dusky-skinned Cristina and discover who really killed Indian Agent Wright, he runs up against powerful enemies. Grasping, power-mad Clay Hackett and his vicious foreman are ruthless in their opposition, and even Lee's sweetheart puts obstacles in his path. The trail to truth and justice is a dangerous and exciting one, and Lee Banner seems to fight a lost cause until the last possible moment. A story replete with memorable characters and breathtaking action.

OUTPOST, *by Walt Sheldon*

A thrilling Plains cavalry novelette. Captain Jesse Daniels rates the service next to slavery—until a young West Pointer, a pair of clear blue eyes, and the menace of renegade raiders serve to change his mind.

NIGHT ON DON JAIME STREET, *by Ernest Haycox*

A Western classic. Don Jaime Street waits tensely as Curly Jack looks for Doc Holliday—but the other part of town knows little of the crisis, and cares less.

VIRGIN TERRITORY, *by Giff Cheshire*

With the Rogues on the prowl outside, and three determined females inside, Bret Prior has reason to be worried!

—and other outstanding features about the Old West of song and story.